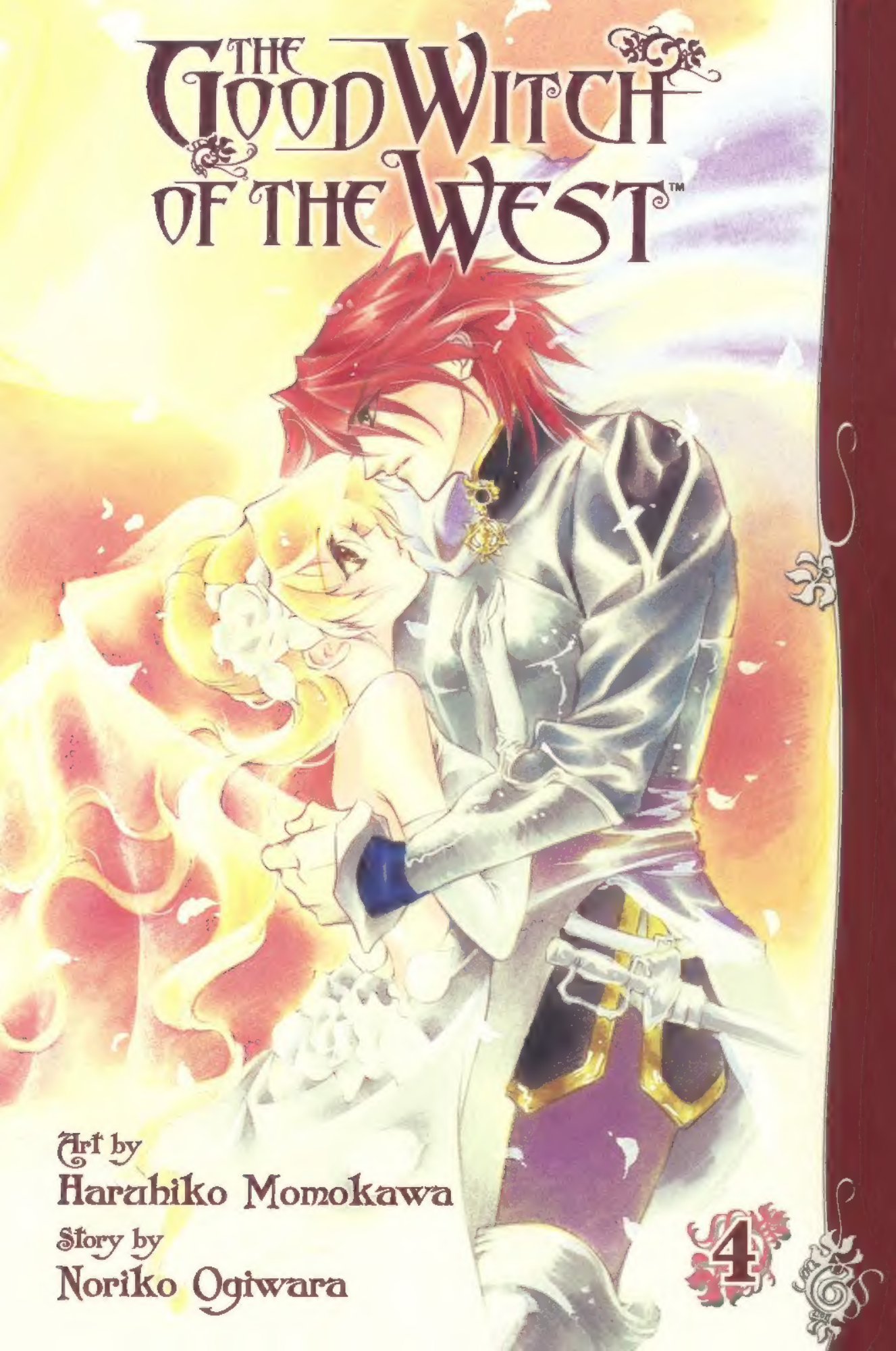
THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™



Art by
Harubiko Momokawa

Story by
Noriko Ogiwara

4

The Good Witch of the West Volume 4

Story By Noriko Ogiwara

Art By Haruhiko Momokawa

© 2005 NORIKO OGIWARA/HARUHIKO MOMOKAWA. All Rights Reserved. First published in Japan in 2005 by MAG Garden Corporation. English translation rights arranged with MAG Garden Corporation.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the copyright holders. This manga is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The Good Witch of the West™

Story by Noriko Ogiwara
Art by Haruhiko Momokawa

Volume 4

Story so far in

THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™

The Star Queen Astraea rules Graal, a fairy-tale kingdom in which good and the Light prevail. Heretics are condemned with the utmost fervor. But one of the daughters of the Star Queen, Edilene, chose a heretic as a lover, and was banished with him to a cold tower in the harsh highlands of Sera Field.

Years later, fifteen-year-old Firiel Dee, daughter of the reclusive Professor Dee and the late Edilene, learns she's a Queen-in-Waiting, a potential heir to the throne of Graal, when an unusual heirloom necklace is recognized at the Roland family ball as proof of her royal blood!

Soon after, Firiel's home is destroyed, her servant killed, her father gone missing, and her best friend Rune, the professor's apprentice, kidnapped. Using her newfound status as a granddaughter of the Star Queen Astraea, Firiel, with the assistance of the Rolands, rescues Rune.

In return for Rune's protection by the house Roland, Firiel agrees to attend Taurus Academy. But Firiel quickly finds the ladies' finishing school to be a nest of vipers...

Main Characters

Firiel

Rune

Adale

Lusis

Professor Dee

Lot

Tabitha and
Bo Holy

Leandra
Cheviat

Marie

Main Characters

Ravenna

Igraine

Yincent

Cisaria

Margot and
Owen Roland

Liamon Riez

Prophecy

The Good Witch of the West
and the Brave King of the East
summoned a wise man and a poet,
then traveled to an icy city.
The end begins when the
midday star falls from the sky.
Who is standing behind you?
That...

(from a children's tale in fenistell)

Contents

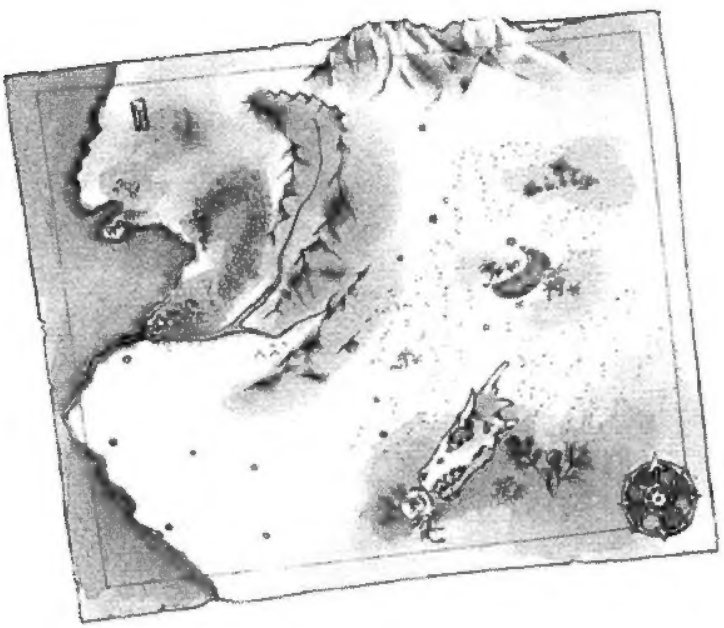
Chapter 15
Tainted Stage 9

Chapter 16
The Name of the Rose 49

Chapter 17
The Palace Waltz 85

Chapter 18
Eyes of the Serpent 121

Chapter 19
A fantasia and a fugue 151



OKAY, THIS WAY'S NORTH! YOU CAN TELL BY WHERE THE LICHEN IS GROWING.
WE'LL MAKE IT BACK HOME, FIRIEL! WE'LL BE OKAY!
SO THIS WAY LEADS BACK TO THE TOWER.
OH, THANK THE STARS...
FIRIEL?
RUNE, WAIT! DON'T GO THAT WAY!

Chapter 15: Tainted Stage

IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S REACHED HER LIMIT.
SISTER FIRIEL...!

COME ON, FIRIEL! HANG IN THERE!
UNFORTU-NATELY...
...IT SEEMS THAT THIS DUEL IS ALL BUT DECIDED.
FIRIEL IS BARELY STANDING.
VIN-CENT!
NO, IT'S OKAY, MARIE. FIRIEL HAS ALREADY DONE HER DUTY ADMIRABLY WELL.
LOOK...
EVEN IF FIRIEL SHOULD LOSE THE DUEL...
...THE STUDENT BODY WILL NOT ALL RETURN TO THE STUDENT COUNCIL'S SIDE.
THEY HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THERE IS MORE THAN ONE KIND OF CHARISMA AT THE ACADEMY.

IT APPEARS THAT YOU HAVE ALL DETERMINED THAT FIRIEL'S GOING TO LOSE.
I WOULDN'T BE SO SURE IF I WERE YOU.
FIRIEL HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO DO INEXPLICABLE THINGS WHEN UNDER PRESSURE LIKE THIS.
フッ…
THANK YOU...
...FIRIEL.
AND I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR THAT.

SHE'S USED THAT TALENT TO SAVE MY LIFE MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT.
"THANK THE STARS YOU TWO WERE SO LUCKY!"
"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU FOUND THAT LITTLE SHEEP SHED!"
"IF YOU HAD GONE THE OTHER WAY, YOU WOULD HAVE HEADED STRAIGHT INTO A SWAMP!"

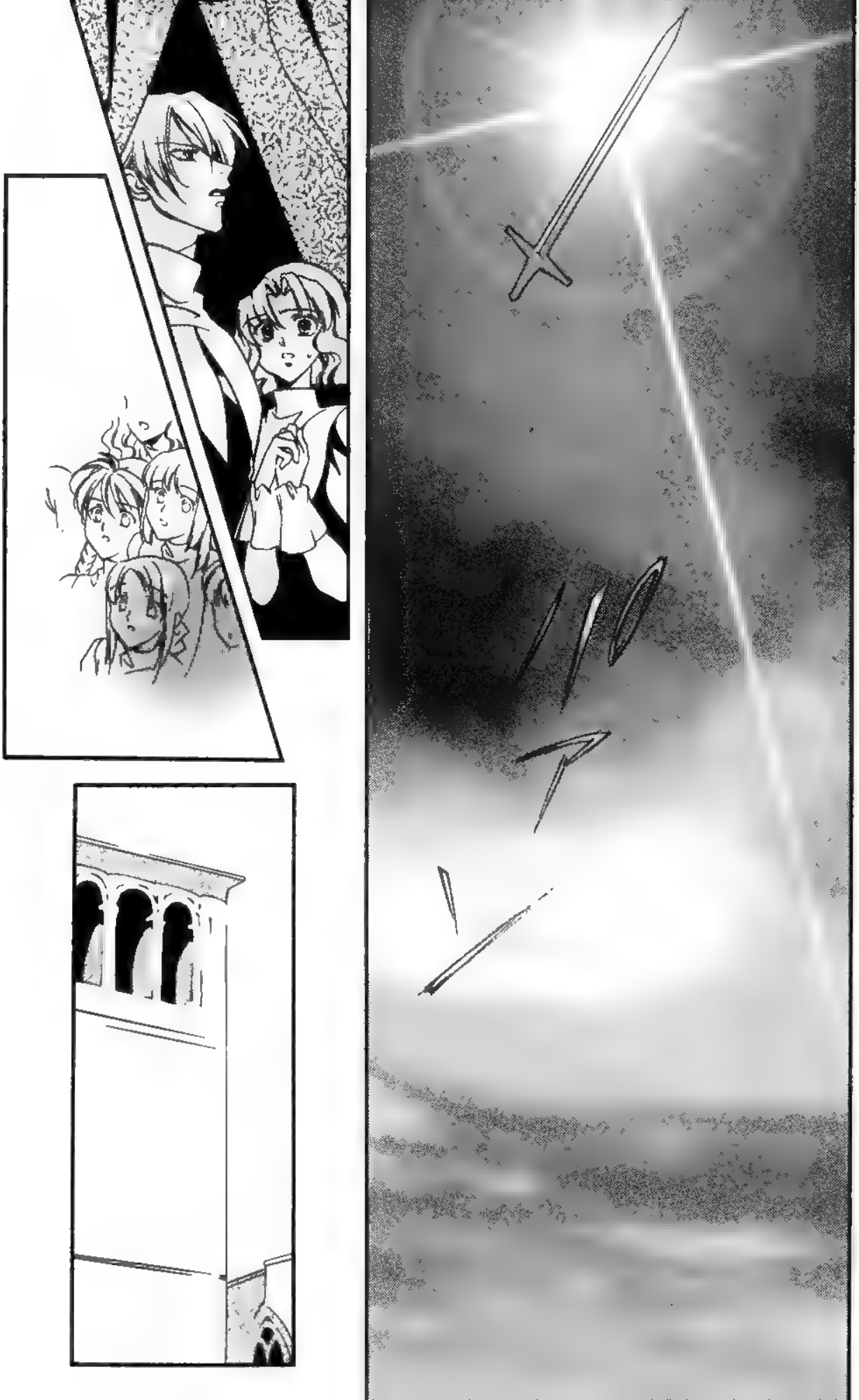
EVA...
WATCHING HER, I CAN'T HELP THINKING...
THE TWO OF THEM ARE SO TERRIBLY ALIKE.
SHE DOESN'T REALIZE IT, BUT SHE STEERS OTHERS IN A GOOD DIRECTION.
THE INCREDIBLE LUCK OF THE STARS--ONLY A VERY FEW WOMEN IN GRAAL ARE BLESSED WITH THAT POWER.
FIRIEL IS--

I NEVER DID LIKE THAT GAUDY HAIR OF YOURS.
NEXT, I THINK I'LL GOUGE OUT YOUR EYES.
THEN I'LL START ON RUNETTE.
THERE'S NO WAY I'M LETTING THAT LITTLE INTERLOPER STEAL MY PLACE IN SISTER LAIN'S FAVOR!
ONCE THAT EPHEMERIS THING IS HANDED OVER, SISTER LAIN WON'T HAVE ANY USE FOR HER ANYWAY!
AND USELESS THINGS DESERVE A QUICK BURIAL-- NOTHING MORE!

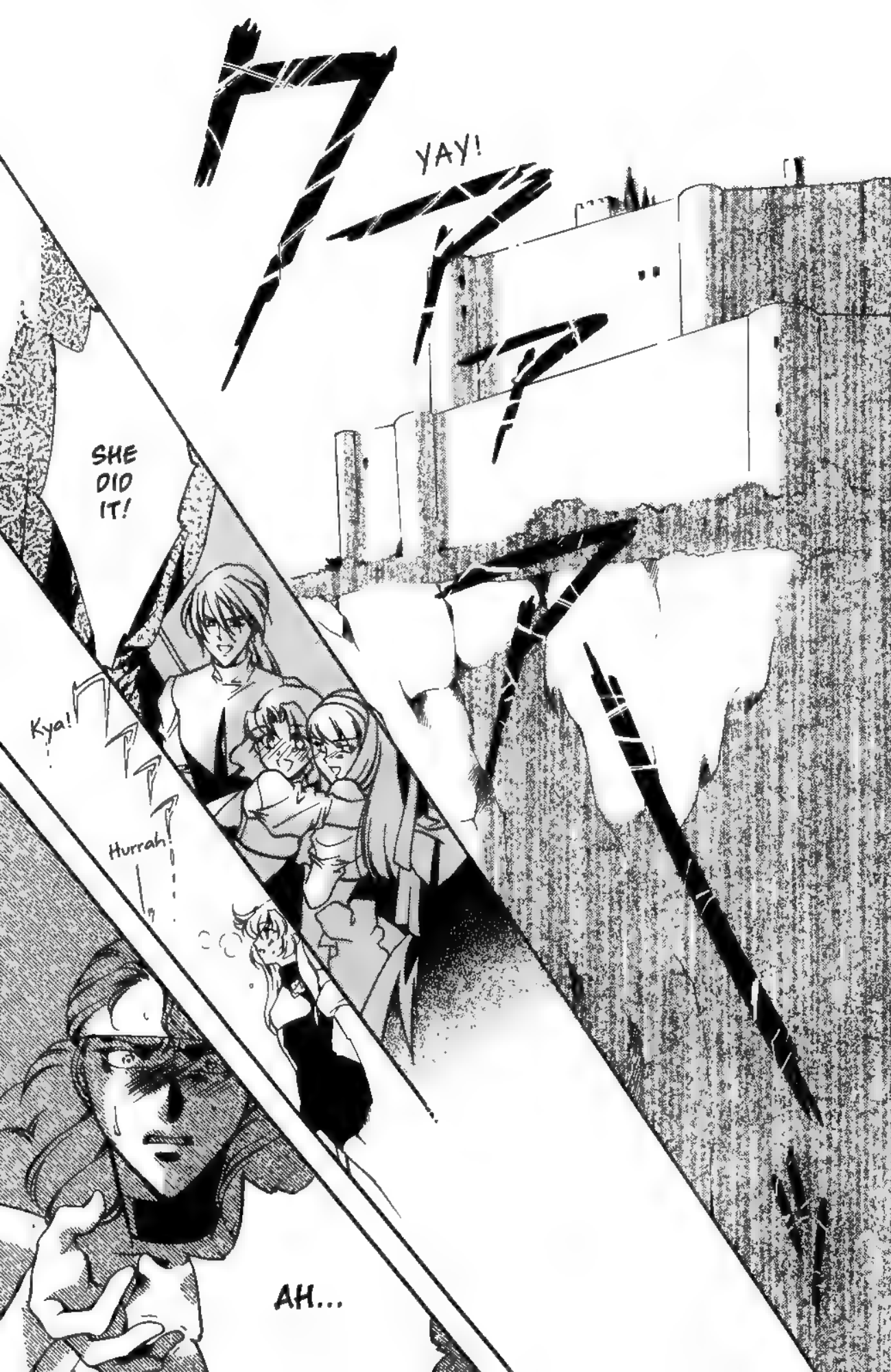
...DOESN'T IT, RAVENNA?
THE SAME THING GOES FOR YOU, TOO...
YOU LOOK AT RUNE AS IF HE'S NOTHING MORE THAN A TOOL, A THING.
YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST.
OTHERS HAVE WANTED HIS BRAINS, OR THE EPHEMERIS, OR OTHER THINGS.
THAT'S THE ONLY VALUE THEY EVER SAW IN HIM.

EVERY TIME...!
PEOPLE LIKE YOU NEARLY KILLED RUNE!

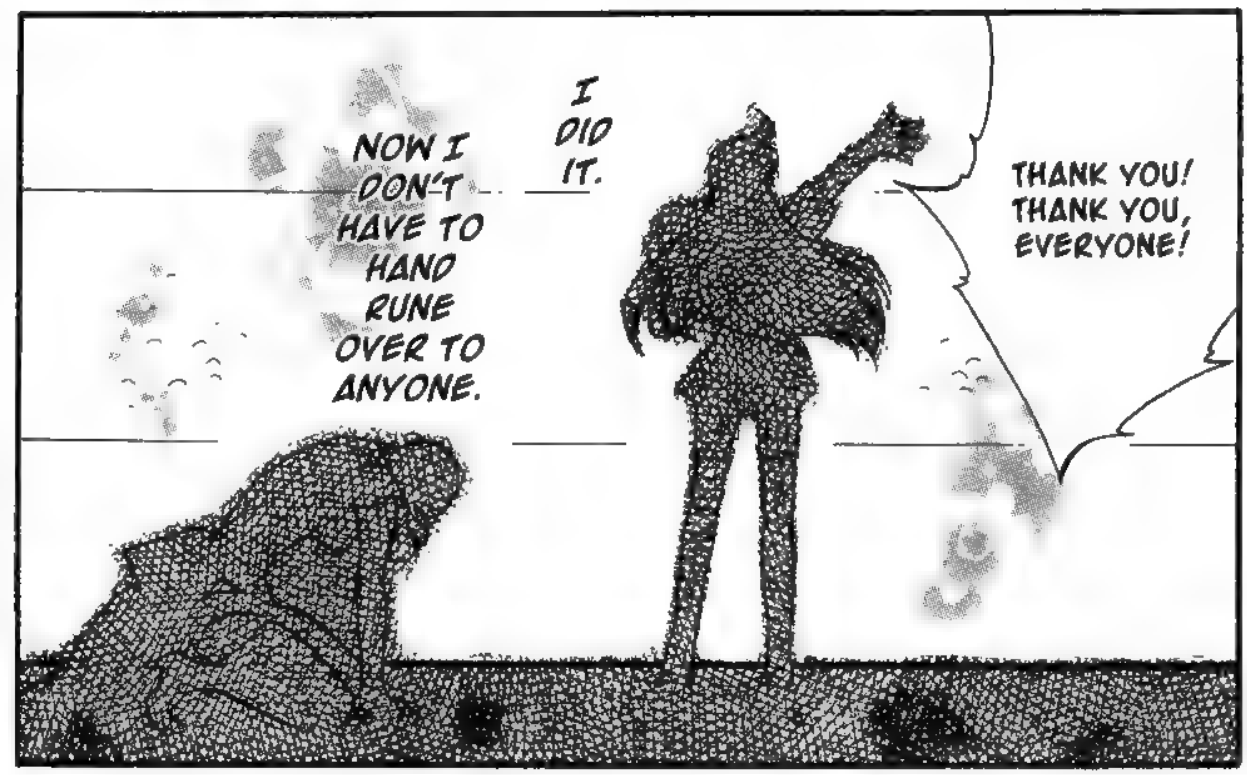
UNPH!
I WILL NEVER...
...EVER LET PEOPLE LIKE THAT GET RUNE AGAIN.



huff
huff
huff


YAY!
SHE DID IT!
Kya!
Hurrah!
AH...

SISTER FIRIEL!
ポス
Hurrah!
Kya!


I DID IT.
NOW I DON'T HAVE TO HAND RUNE OVER TO ANYONE.
THANK YOU! THANK YOU, EVERYONE!

THANK THE STARS...
THE SACRIFICIAL MAIDEN GIVES A BOUQUET TO THE WINNER.
TIME FOR THE FINALE.
Kya!
Wah!
CON-GRATU-LATIONS ...
...FIRIEL.

clang
CISARIA ...!
BUT, WHY?
YOU TRULY ARE A VERY LUCKY PERSON.

I WAS EVEN HAPPY...
...THEN I COULD HAVE BEEN NICE.
IF ONLY YOU HAD STAYED THE POOR, PITIFUL OUTCAST...
I DON'T REMEMBER THIS BEING IN THE SCRIPT.
サク…
...THAT ROSELITTE FELL, NOT YOU.
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO KILLED ROSELITTE!
HOW DARE YOU RUIN OUR PLAYS!
YOU!
YOU DID IT?!
"HOW DARE I"...?

I OVERHEARD YOU...
...AND YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL.
I OVERHEARD YOU PLOTTING TREASON AGAINST THE STAR QUEEN!!
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.
YES.
EXACTLY.
QUEEN CONSTANCE'S TOO-LONG REIGN HAS GROUND OUR COUNTRY TO A HALT.
TO PREVENT UTTER STAGNATION, SOMETHING MORE THAN JUST A SIMPLE, QUIET SUCCESSION IS NEEDED.

WE NEED A BRUTAL REVOLUTION TO CRUSH THE OLD WAYS AND COMPLETELY REINVENT GRAAL.
I DECIDED I MUST STOP YOUR EVIL TREACHERY, EVEN AT THE COST OF MY OWN LIFE.
"ONE DAY, I MIGHT EVEN BE ALLOWED TO SERVE QUEEN ASTRAEA HERSELF!"
QUEEN ASTRAEA IS THE GODDESS' CHOSEN ONE!
SHE IS A DIVINE BEING WHO DESERVES OUR WORSHIP!
MAKING THEM MINE IS THE FIRST STEP TO SUCCESS.
THE LADIES OF THIS ACADEMY ARE GRAAL'S FUTURE.
THEY WILL BE THE POINT TOPPING THE SPEAR OF REVOLUTION.
FILTHY TRAITOR!

"IF IT WERE FOR HER MAJESTY'S SAKE, I WOULD HAPPILY DO ANYTHING, EVEN IF IT MEANT MY LIFE."
AND YOU ARE JUST AS FILTHY AS THEM, FIRIEL.
THE TAURUS ACADEMY IS THE STAR QUEEN'S TREASURE! IT IS MEANT TO SHOW YOUNG LADIES THE GLORIES OF HER MAJESTY!
BUT YOU! YOU DRAW EVERYONE'S ATTENTION AWAY FROM HER--STEALING AWAY THE LOYALTY THAT RIGHTFULLY BELONGS TO HER!
CISARIA!

CISARIA, DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU DID?
YOU KILLED SOME-ONE!
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE IS WORSHIP OF THE GODDESS.
DEATH AND MURDER DO NOT MEAN MUCH TO ME, FIRIEL.
FOR HER MAJESTY'S SAKE, EVEN MY OWN LIFE IS AS NOTHING TO ME.
THE ACADEMY HAS BEEN POLLUTED. A SACRIFICE IS NEEDED TO PURIFY IT.

IN HER MAJESTY'S NAME...!
CISARIA!
Eek!
SHEESH.

RUNE!
I DECIDED I MIGHT AS WELL, SINCE...
...ANY DEATH MAKES FIRIEL CRY.
PERSONALLY, I WOULDN'T HAVE BOTHERED. JUST SO YOU KNOW.

YOU OF ALL PEOPLE WOULD KNOW PEOPLE WHO COMMIT SUICIDE...
...CAN'T GO TO THE PARADISE OF THE STARS.
QUEEN ASTRAEA...
...DOESN'T WANT ANY MARTYRS. I'M SURE OF IT.
YOU'RE WRONG, CISARIA.
EVEN IF YOU DID COMMIT A HORRIBLE CRIME...
YOU HAVE TO LIVE AND ATONE FOR YOUR WRONGS!
...YOU HAVE TO LIVE! YOU CAN'T JUST GIVE UP AND DIE!

Waaaaah!
WELL, WE'VE FINALLY CAUGHT THE PERSON WHO WAS TRYING TO KILL YOU.
NOW MY DUTY HERE AT THE ACADEMY IS DONE.
WHAT? THAT'S ALL YOU WERE HERE FOR?
JUST TO CAPTURE THE PERSON WHO TRIED TO KILL ME?
OF COURSE! I'D NEVER...
...PARADE ABOUT IN GIRLS' CLOTHES OTHERWISE-- NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE COUNT ORDERED!

THANKS, RUNE!
YOU REALLY ARE THE ONE PERSON I CAN TRUST THE MOST!
WHY, YOU--!!

LOOK, EVERY-ONE!
THE "RUNETTE" YOU SEE HERE IS REALLY A BOY!
MALES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FORBIDDEN ENTRANCE TO OUR ACADEMY, YET HERE ONE STANDS!

THE ACADEMY WAS INFILTRATED BY A BOY?!
FIRIEL...!
A BOY?! HOW?!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
A BOY...?!
PETALS?

I HAVE COME HERE TODAY...
ATTENTION, EVERYONE. THERE IS NO CAUSE FOR ALARM.
THIS CHALLENGE WAS INVALID FROM THE BEGINNING.
...TO ANNOUNCE TO EVERYONE THAT THE CURRENT STUDENT COUNCIL IS INVALID.
ADALE?!
EVAN-GELINE?!
LOOK! IT'S LADY EVANGELINE!

IT FORBIDS ANY OUTSIDE POWER FROM EVER INFLUENCING THE ACTIONS OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL.
IN THE STUDENT COUNCIL'S CHARTER THERE IS A SPECIAL BYLAW.
I WILL NOT NAME THE PERSON BEHIND THIS INFRACTION.
THE CURRENT STUDENT COUNCIL IS IN VIOLATION OF THIS BYLAW.
...HER SOFT VOICE IS CARRYING A STRONG MESSAGE.
ADALE LOOKS AS DELICATE AS A BIRD, BUT...
RULE BY THE STUDENTS FOR THE STUDENTS HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PRIDE OF THIS ACADEMY.
I REQUEST YOU WITHDRAW IMMEDIATELY.
HOWEVER, I WILL TELL HER THIS.
YOUR PLANS HERE AT THE ACADEMY HAVE FAILED.

NOW, EVERYONE.
THERE WAS NO CHALLENGE. THERE IS NO BOY STANDING ON THE STAGE.
AS THE STUDENT COUNCIL ITSELF IS INVALID, IT FOLLOWS THAT WHAT OCCURRED HERE ON STAGE IS ALSO INVALID. IT IS AS IF NOTHING EVER HAPPENED.
DO YOU HEAR SOME-THING?
I TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS ENTIRE MISHAP.

RUNE!
JUMP!

KYA
!!

DID I...
ガク

YOU MEAN, LIKE THE ONES IN EVANGELINE'S NOVEL...?
...JUST SEE A RED-HAIRED KNIGHT AND A BLACK-HAIRED YOUNG BOY...?
NO WAY!
ガク
ガク

ガラガラ

FIRIEL, DON'T BE SO DEPRESSED.

WELL DONE!
VERY IMPRESSIVE CONCLUSION, PRINCESS ADALE!

BUT... THREE MONTHS!
I WAS ONLY THERE THREE MONTHS BEFORE THEY ASKED ME TO LEAVE!

YOU AND SIR RUNE ARE SUCH TROUBLEMAKERS.
NO NO
THERE'S NO WAY I COULD FACE THE COUNT NOW!

YES. SO YOU...
...AND SIR RUNE...
...AND MARIE AND LORD EUSIS AND MYSELF...
HIERAGLION...!
...WILL GO TOGETHER TO THE ROYAL COURT AT HIERAGLION THIS FALL!

WHAT ...?
SO MUCH SO THAT FATHER SAID THIS...
"...THEN SHE MIGHT AS WELL COME RIGHT UP TO HIERAGLION. THAT WAY I CAN KEEP AN EYE ON HER PERSONALLY."
"IF SHE IS SUCH AN UNRULY GIRL THAT EVEN THE PRESTIGIOUS TAURUS ACADEMY CANNOT TAME HER..."

THE SHINING PALACE EVERYONE SAYS IS MADE ENTIRELY OF PLATINUM...
THE PLACE WHERE HER MAJESTY THE STAR QUEEN LIVES...
ALL OF US, GOING THERE...!?
HM...

AN UNEXPECTED HINDRANCE DISRUPTED THINGS THIS TIME...
...BUT THE REAL BATTLE WILL COME AT HIERAGLION. THAT'S WHERE EVERYTHING...
...WILL BE DECIDED.
AS WILL EVERYTHING BETWEEN US, TOO, GRANDMOTHER.

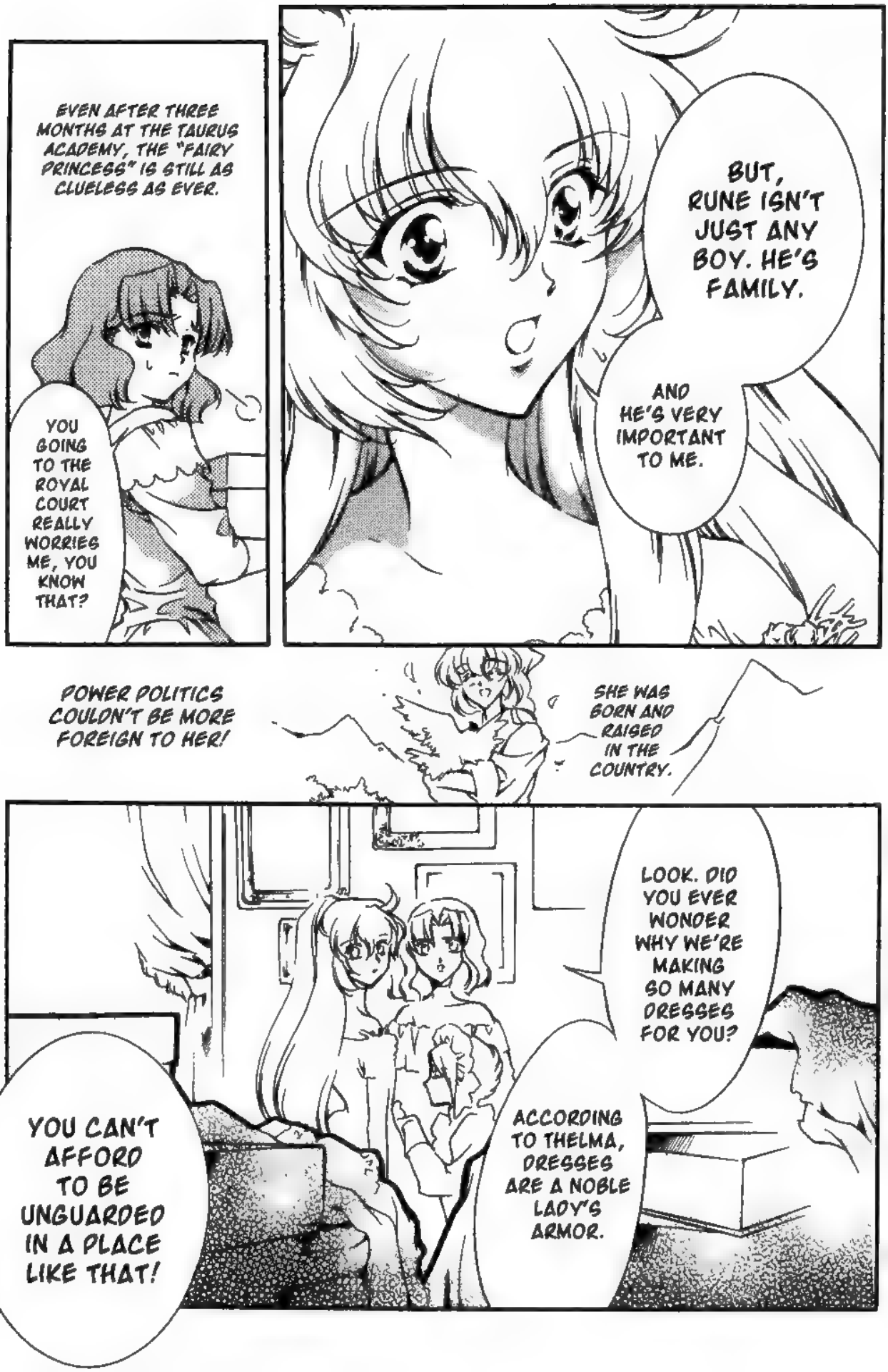
AND I WILL BE THE ONE WHO WINS IN THE END.
HMM. THE EPHEMERIS...
...AND THE THIRD DAUGHTER WHO SHARES OUR BLOODLINE...
WHAT SAY I MAKE MY FIRST MOVE IN THIS NEW GAME OF DESTROYING EVERYTHING MY BABY SISTER HOLDS DEAR?

"THE FEAST OF THE FLOWERS."
THERE ARE SOME WHO SO LABEL THE STRUGGLE FOR ASTRAEA'S THRONE...
...SINCE THE SPECTACLE OF THE WARRING QUEENS-IN-WAITING RESEMBLES NOTHING SO MUCH AS SPECTACULAR AND FLAMBOYANT FLOWERS COMPETING FOR THE MOST BRILLIANT BLOOM.
BUT UNDER THE PAGEANTRY, THE POWER PLAYS TWIST LIKE THORNS IN THE DIRT OF POLITICS. BODIES OF THE VICTIMS ARE TURNED INTO THE FIELDS WITH THE DAWN OF EVERY NEW QUEEN'S REIGN.

Chapter 16: The Name of the Rose

BUT, KISS ME AGAIN...
RUNE!
...AND THERE IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY...
...THAT I'LL FINISH MY ENTIRE DINNER AND EVEN GO OUTSIDE FOR A WALK.
RUNE, YOU ARE UNBELIEVABLE.
MISS FIRIEL !!!
...MAYBE.

NOT ONLY DID YOU KISS RUNE IN THE MIDDLE OF A WIDE-OPEN HALLWAY, BUT THEN YOU HAD TO GET CAUGHT BY GOVERNESS MADAM THELMA, OF ALL PEOPLE!
MARIE...
FIRIEL, YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY UNBELIEVABLE!
I-I DIDN'T THINK KISSING SOMEONE WAS SUCH A HORRIBLE THING.
THAT RIGHT THERE IS ONE OF YOUR BIGGEST PROBLEMS.
THIS ISN'T SERA FIELD, FIRIEL! YOU'RE ABOUT TO ACCOMPANY A QUEEN-IN-WAITING TO HIERAGLION! DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S OKAY FOR A LADY LIKE YOU TO KISS BOYS FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE?


EVEN AFTER THREE MONTHS AT THE TAURUS ACADEMY, THE "FAIRY PRINCESS" IS STILL AS CLUELESS AS EVER.
YOU GOING TO THE ROYAL COURT REALLY WORRIES ME, YOU KNOW THAT?
BUT, RUNE ISN'T JUST ANY BOY. HE'S FAMILY.
AND HE'S VERY IMPORTANT TO ME.
POWER POLITICS COULDN'T BE MORE FOREIGN TO HER!
SHE WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE COUNTRY.
LOOK. DID YOU EVER WONDER WHY WE'RE MAKING SO MANY DRESSES FOR YOU?
ACCORDING TO THELMA, DRESSES ARE A NOBLE LADY'S ARMOR.
YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BE UNGUARDED IN A PLACE LIKE THAT!

LADY ADALE MAY LOOK FRAGILE AND PETITE, BUT SHE'S A QUEEN-IN-WAITING! SHE'S BEEN TRAINED TO SURVIVE AT THE ROYAL COURT HER ENTIRE LIFE.
BUT NOT YOU.
YOUR ROYAL BLOOD IS A FIRECRACKER JUST WAITING TO EXPLODE, AND YOU'RE WALKING IT RIGHT INTO A FIRE!
IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERN FOR YOUR LIFE AT ALL, PLEASE, PLEASE BE A LITTLE MORE SERIOUS AND CAUTIOUS!
BUT...
...I REALLY LIKE KISSING RUNE.
FIRIEL!
HE'S A LOT LIKE A PUPPY.
IT'S JUST THE "TREATS" HE TRIES TO WHEEDLE OUT OF ME ARE KISSES.
WHEN HE GETS ONE, THE DARKNESS AROUND HIM SEEMS TO FADE A LITTLE.

AND...
WHEN RUNE SMILES, HE LOOKS SO CUTE.
UN-BELIEV-ABLE!
YOU TRULY ARE A GENIUS.
HIS APTITUDE FOR SETTING EFFECTIVE AMBUSHES IS INCREDIBLE.
PUT IN MILITARY TERMS, HE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME THE KIND OF TACTICIAN SEEN ONLY ONCE IN GENERATIONS.
IN JUST THREE MONTHS...
YOU SHOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM AT ALL GOING TO HIERAGLION AS A CANDIDATE FOR CHESS-MASTER.
A POWER THAT COULD TURN DEADLY IF MIS-HANDLED.
THERE IS NOTHING MORE I CAN TEACH YOU.

UM... WHAT?
I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK.
FIRST HIS TEARS...
...NOW HIS SMILES. I FEEL PRIVY TO SOMETHING NOT MEANT FOR ME.
IF I BEAT YOU THREE TIMES IN A ROW...
GRACIOUS! MY LORD BROTHER, WHAT HAPPENED?!

RUNE DID WHAT?!
LORD EUSIS, I'M SO SORRY!
I'LL GIVE HIM A SCOLDING THAT'LL BLISTER HIS EARS FOR THAT!
WHYEVER WOULD SIR RUNE DECIDE TO THROW A CHESSBOARD AT YOU?
RUNE THREW THE CHESSBOARD AT ME.
ANYONE WITH AN OUNCE OF SENSE WOULD REALIZE INSTANTLY THAT TEACHING THE SWORD TO SOMEONE SO SKINNY IS PREPOSTEROUS.
?
I LAUGHED...
...WHEN HE ASKED ME TO TEACH HIM SWORDSMANSHIP.
WHY WOULD HE WANT TO LEARN THAT?
BUT NOW YOU TWO GET ALONG WELL ENOUGH TO BICKER.
HOW WONDERFUL!
WELL! THAT'S WHAT YOU DESERVE, THEN! LAUGHING AT HIS REQUEST WAS HARDLY POLITE.
SWORDSMANSHIP...?

MY LORD, DO YOU KNOW WHY RUNE MIGHT WANT TO LEARN SWORDSMAN-SHIP?
I HAVE A VERY BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.
ACCORDING TO DOCTOR MELING...
...RUNE HAS BEEN BORROWING HIS BOOKS ON POISONS.
THE INJURIES HE GOT FROM HIS CAPTIVITY ARE LONG HEALED ...
...BUT I'M AFRAID HE HAS OTHER WOUNDS THAT STILL PAIN HIM, ONES THAT CAN'T BE HEALED BY MEDICINES.

AND HE'S KEEPING THEM ALL CLOSED UP INSIDE, WHERE THEY'RE STARTING TO FESTER.
"I WON'T GET ANOTHER PEACEFUL NIGHT'S SLEEP UNTIL I'VE KILLED EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM."
...BUT NOW IT FEELS LIKE THE INJURIES TEARING RUNE APART FROM THE INSIDE ARE STEALING HIM AWAY FROM ME AGAIN.
YOU DID SO MUCH TO SAVE HIM FROM THE SERPENT AND STAR AND BRING HIM BACK TO ME, LORD EUSIS ...
FIRIEL...
I...
...SHE IS LIKE A TRUE MOTHER TO HIM.
FIRIEL DEE.
...SHE NEVER HESITATES TO PUT HER OWN LIFE IN DANGER TO PROTECT HIS. EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE THE SAME AGE...
SHE'S ALWAYS AT RUNE'S SIDE, WORRYING FOR HIS SAFETY. AND, WHEN THE NEED ARISES...

RUNE WILL BE FINE. I AM CERTAIN OF IT.
LORD EUSIS...
HE HAS YOU, AFTER ALL.
TOGETHER, YOU TWO CAN OVERCOME ANY OBSTACLE.

YES! THANK YOU, LORD EUSIS!
THAT'S SPECIAL TO A GIRL...
AND I GOT TO DANCE MY FIRST DANCE WITH HIM!
...AND I GOT TO--
?
OH GOSH! I'M BLUSHING!
LORD EUSIS IS SUCH A WONDERFUL GENTLEMAN...
...FAR MORE SO THAN ANY FAIRYTALE'S PRINCE CHARMING.

YOU CALL MY YOUNGER SISTER SIMPLY "ADALE" WITH NO HESITATION.
WHY MUST I BE THE ONLY ONE TREATED LIKE A STRANGER?
UH!
FIRIEL, WHY DO YOU INSIST ON CALLING ME "LORD" EUSIS?
UM... WELL...
YOU'RE THE HEIR TO A POWERFUL NOBLE FAMILY...
YOU OUTRANK ME, YOU KNOW.
YOU ARE OF THE ROYAL FAMILY, WHILE I AM THE SON OF A MERE COUNT.
.....
AND HE'S ALSO AN EXTREMELY DIRECT PERSON!
FIRIEL!
I-IF YOU INSIST... UM...
EUSIS...

RUNE?
RUNE, WHAT'S GOING ON?! YOU'RE ACTING SO STRANGE!
RUNE!
...TWO LOVERS BLESSED BY THE LIGHT.
THEY LOOKED LIKE THE PERFECT COUPLE...
FIRIEL, LET'S LEAVE THE CASTLE. TONIGHT. FOR SERA FIELD'S OBSERVA-TORY.
RUNE, WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!
Huff! Huff!

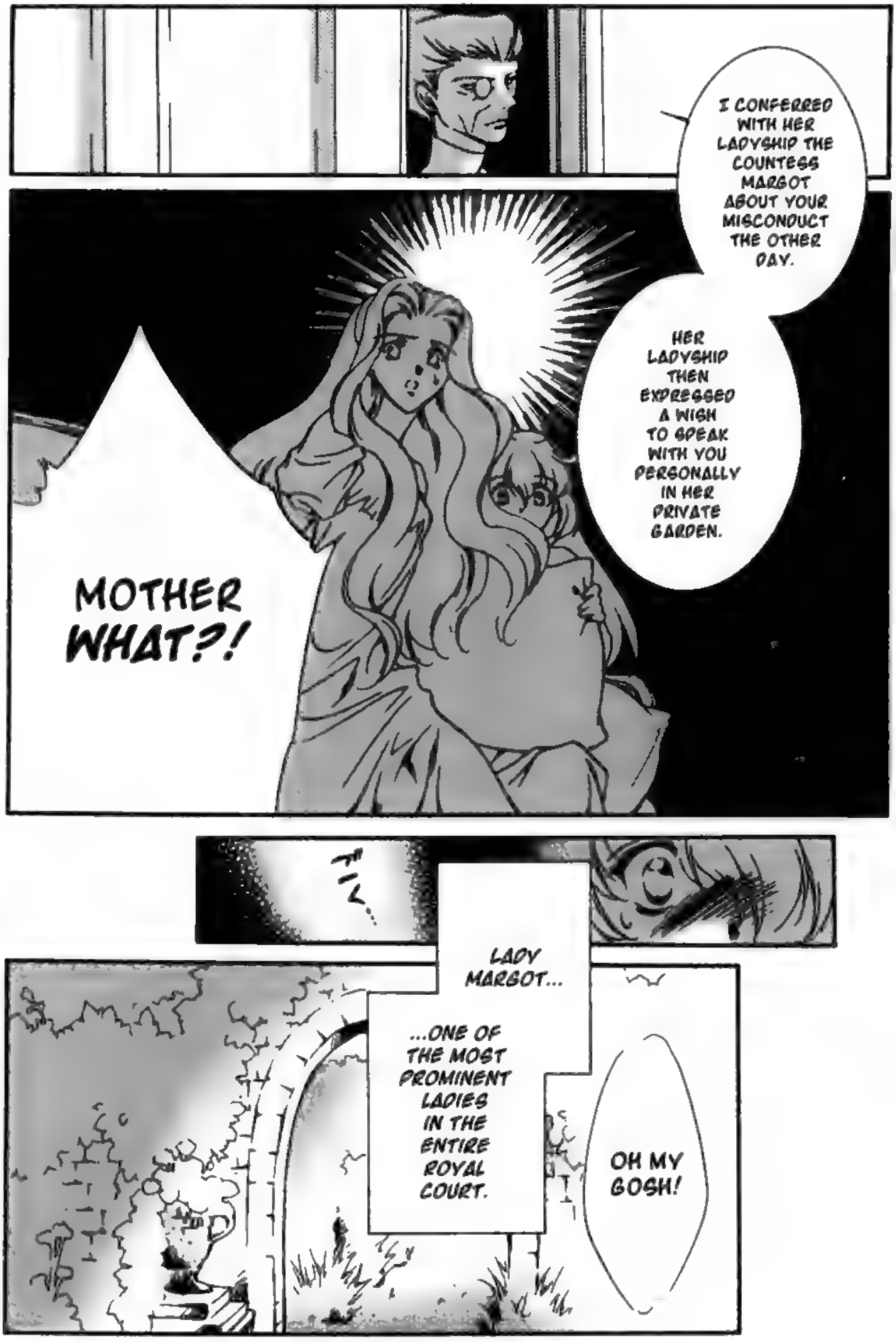
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? OF COURSE WE'LL COME BACK!
WE CAN'T DO THAT! IT WOULD CAUSE HEAPS OF TROUBLE AND INCONVENIENCE FOR THE COUNT!
LEAVE THE CASTLE?!
IT TAKES A WHOLE FIVE DAYS BY CARRIAGE TO GET TO HIERAGLION FROM HERE. THERE'S A CHANCE WE WON'T BE COMING BACK--
DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHERE YOUR MOTHER'S GRAVE IS?!
FIRIEL KNOWS. SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN GOOD AT GUESSING THINGS.
REMEMBER?
SOMEDAY, WE WILL GO BACK TO SERA FIELD AND THE OBSERVATORY. TOGETHER!
THAT'S A PROMISE!
YOU HAVE TO LIVE, GOT IT? YOU SAID YOU'D SHOW ME WHERE MOTHER'S GRAVE IS.

RIGHT NOW, HER WARM HANDS HOLD MINE. BUT SOMEDAY SOON, I'LL HAVE TO--
SHE KNOWS MY REAL REASON FOR GOING TO THE ROYAL COURT.
ONCE WE GET THERE, I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO SERA FIELD.
WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS GRANDMOTHER?
FIRIEL, I'M SORRY...

I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT OF HER AS A KIND OF GODDESS.
I WAS EIGHT WHEN I FIRST SAW THE STATUES WITH THE OUT-STRETCHED HANDS...
...AND STERN AND DIGNIFIED LOOK IN THE CATHEDRAL.
I PRAYED WHENEVER I WAS THANKFUL, OR SAD, OR IN TROUBLE.
I PRAYED FOR HER TO HEAL OUR ANIMALS WHEN THEY WERE SICK.
THE GRANDMOTHER I MET WAS NOT A GODDESS.
SHE WAS HUMAN, JUST LIKE THE REST OF US.
I ONLY MET HER ONCE.
SHE WAS SO MUCH SMALLER THAN I HAD IMAGINED.
COME HERE, ADALE.

CONGRATU-LATIONS, LADY ADALE.
CONGRATU-LATIONS.
LET A DROP OF YOUR BLOOD TOUCH THE QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE IN MY RING.
YOU POOR...
...POOR CHILD.
"POOR CHILD"?
HUH? WHY WOULD HER MAJESTY SAY THAT?

FORBIDDEN TO MARRY ONCE YOU ACHIEVE THE THRONE, BECAUSE YOU ARE A GODDESS...
FORCED TO BATTLE YOUR BLOOD SISTERS FOR THE THRONE...
RAISED WITHOUT EVER KNOWING YOUR OWN PARENTS...
ANY DAUGHTERS YOU MIGHT BEAR TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU AT BIRTH...
BECAUSE SHE KNOWS, BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE...
...OUR LONELINESS.
ONLY A QUEEN COULD SAY THAT TO THAT IMPACT...
"YOU POOR, POOR CHILD..."
...AND WHEN I HEARD THOSE WORDS, I KNEW FOR CERTAIN SHE WAS MY GRANDMOTHER.
knock
knock
LADY FIRIEL?
ADALE...


I CONFERRED WITH HER LADYSHIP THE COUNTESS MARGOT ABOUT YOUR MISCONDUCT THE OTHER DAY.
HER LADYSHIP THEN EXPRESSED A WISH TO SPEAK WITH YOU PERSONALLY IN HER PRIVATE GARDEN.
MOTHER
WHAT?!
LADY MARGOT...
...ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT LADIES IN THE ENTIRE ROYAL COURT.
OH MY GOSH!

"WILL YOU BE ALL RIGHT BY YOURSELF?"
I WONDER WHICH FLOWER HAS THIS LOVELY SCENT.
OH WOW! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN!
SHE'S THE COUNT'S WIFE AND POLITICAL PARTNER...
ADALE CALLS HER "VERY STRICT."
!

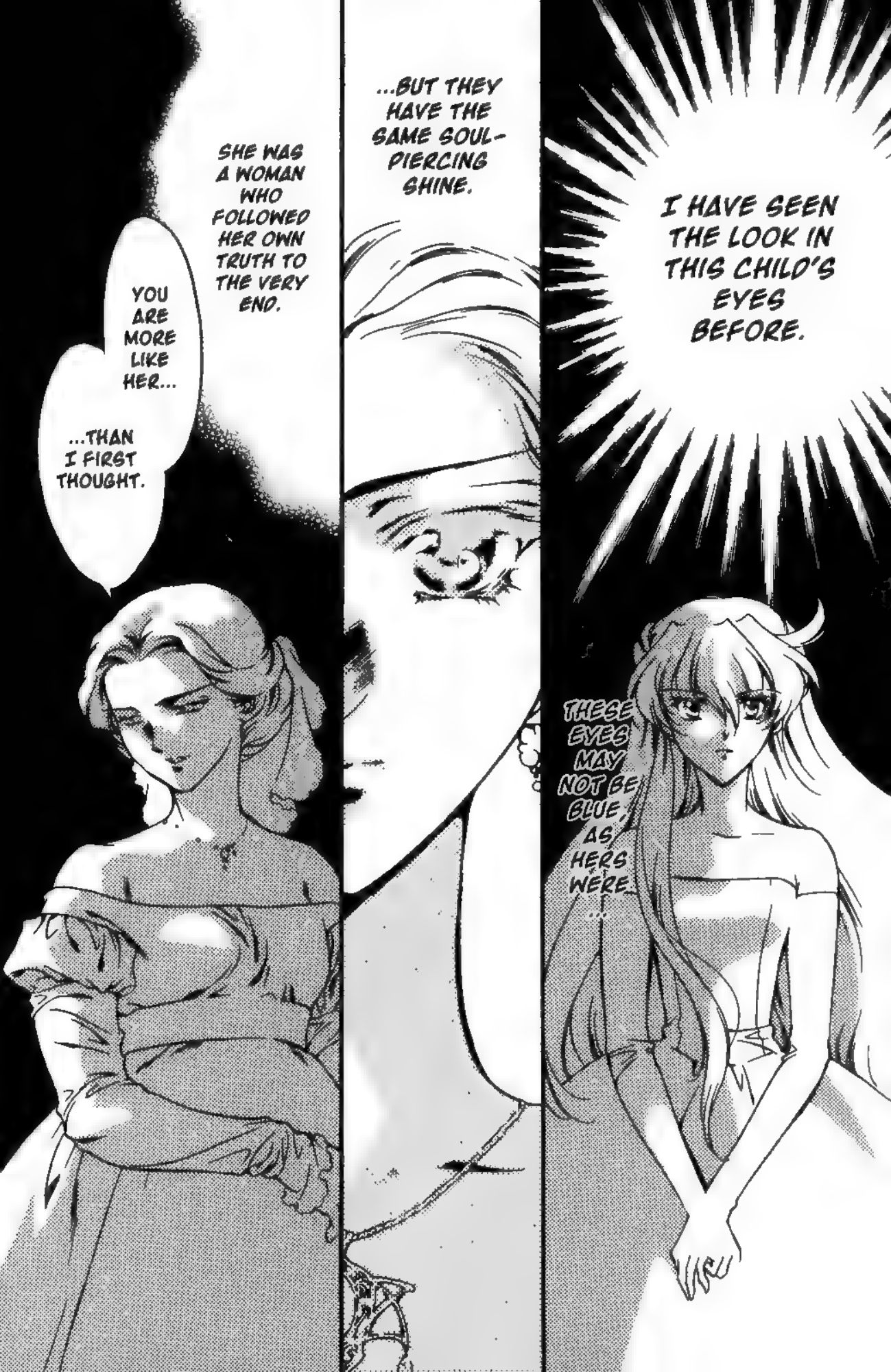
A ROSE! I'VE NEVER SEEN A REAL ONE BEFORE!
IT'S MORE VIVID THAN THE OTHER FLOWERS...
ITS PETALS LOOK SO MUCH MORE DIGNIFIED...
...AND ITS FRAGRANCE IS GLORIOUS!
IT'S ALMOST LIKE...
DO YOU LIKE THEM?
...I'M TURNING THE COLOR OF ROSES.
YES, MA'AM!
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE A REAL ROSE.
BUT I NEVER IMAGINED THEY WOULD HAVE SUCH A LOVELY SCENT.
SHE'S INNOCENT AS A BABE.
I HAVE HEARD THINGS ABOUT YOU FROM THELMA...
...BUT SEEING YOU FOR MYSELF, I UNDER-STAND.

YOU TRULY ARE TERRIBLY NAÏVE.
LIKE A YOUNG ROSEBUD...
...THAT DOES NOT YET KNOW WHAT WATER OR SUNLIGHT MAY BE GIVEN IT.
HOWEVER, DO KEEP IN MIND THAT INNOCENCE IS NO EXCUSE IN HIERAGLION.

EVEN ADALE SAYS SHE GETS SO NERVOUS AROUND HER THAT SHE CAN'T SPEAK STRAIGHT.
FIRIEL DEE.
WHAT INCREDIBLE PRESENCE! AND SHE'S NOT EVEN DOING ANYTHING BUT SITTING!
RUMORS SAY THAT LADY MARGOT CAN MANIPULATE COURT POLITICIANS WITH NOTHING MORE THAN A SINGLE ELEGANT SMILE.
NOW I KNOW WHY SHE'S CONSIDERED THE GREATEST FORCE AMONG ALL THE NOBLE LADIES AT HIERAGLION!
AH...!

THE ROYAL COURT IS THE PLACE WHERE THE BIGGEST, MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS IN THIS REALM GATHER AND COMPETE.
AND AT THE FEET OF THOSE FLOWERS...
...YOU WILL FIND THE WITHERED BUDS OF THOSE SACRIFICED SO THAT ONE FLOWER COULD GROW MORE BRILLIANT.
HIERAGLION IS A CRUEL PLACE, CHILD.
SHOW WEAKNESS FOR EVEN A MOMENT...
...AND YOUR DOWNFALL WILL BE SWIFT, MERCILESS AND COMPLETE.
IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO BECOME ONE OF THOSE BUDS TRIMMED FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER...
...I SUGGEST YOU RESTRAIN FROM FURTHER THOUGHTLESS ACTIONS.
RUNE IS THE WHOLE REASON I'M GOING TO HIERAGLION IN THE FIRST PLACE!
MY LADY, I'M NOT ACTING THOUGHT-LESSLY!

I SHOULD BE ABLE TO LEARN THOSE THINGS IN THE ROYAL COURT.
I MEAN, WHERE ELSE COULD I DISCOVER WHY RUNE AND THE PROFESSOR WERE LABELED "HERETICS" AND WHY HER MAJESTY HATES HERESY SO MUCH?
IN ORDER TO GET THAT POWER, I NEED TO KNOW LOTS OF THINGS.
YES, I AM GOING THERE TO SEEK POWER.
POWER TO PROTECT RUNE!
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE ANYONE ELSE I CARE ABOUT...
...FOR REASONS I DON'T UNDER-STAND!
I SWORE TO MYSELF I WOULD DO WHATEVER NECESSARY TO PREVENT THAT FROM EVER HAPPENING AGAIN!
FIRIEL DEE...


I HAVE SEEN THE LOOK IN THIS CHILD'S EYES BEFORE.
THESE EYES MAY NOT BE BLUE, AS HERS WERE...
...BUT THEY HAVE THE SAME SOUL-PIERCING SHINE.
SHE WAS A WOMAN WHO FOLLOWED HER OWN TRUTH TO THE VERY END.
YOU ARE MORE LIKE HER...
...THAN I FIRST THOUGHT.

A LONG TIME AGO...
...PRINCESS EDILENE ATTEMPTED TO DO THE VERY SAME THING YOU WOULD ATTEMPT NOW.
SHE WANTED TO DISCOVER HOW HERESY BECAME SUCH A TABOO, AND WHAT THE UNDERLYING "TRUTH" OF OUR WORLD WAS.
LIKELY, SHE DID ALL THAT FOR PROFESSOR DEE-- FOR YOUR FATHER'S-- SAKE.
MOTHER DID? REALLY?
BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE, YOU SHOULD KNOW...
...WHERE THAT PATH LEADS.
HERESY IS A DANGEROUS SUBJECT...
ATTEMPTING TO GET NEAR IT IS INVITING DISASTER, FIRIEL DEE.

NO WAY AM I JUST GOING TO SIT AROUND WAITING FOR EVERYTHING TO BE TAKEN AWAY FROM ME.
I AM FULLY PREPARED TO FACE WHATEVER CONSEQUENCES THERE MAY BE, MY LADY.
OWEN HAS TAKEN QUITE A RISK.
!!
SOMEWHERE INSIDE, HE IS STILL CHASING THE IMAGE OF HIS OWN ONE STAR.
...AND THE DREAMS OF HIS YOUTH ONTO THIS YOUNG GIRL.
...BUT HE HAS PROJECTED THE SHADOW OF EDILENE.
MY HUSBAND MAY NOT REALIZE IT...

HERE A GIFT
THEN THE THIRD QUEEN IN WAITING WOULD BE OURS
THIS GIRL IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD.
SHE IS THE CHILD OF PARENTS WHO WERE CONDEMNED AS HERETICS
ONE MISSTEP AND SHE COULD BECOME A SCANDAL BIG ENOUGH TO GIVE THE ENTIRE HOUSE EOLAND

WHAT SHE COULD MEAN TO THE ROLAND FAMILY...
...IS YET UNKNOWN.
GRACIOUS.
THIS BREEZE IS THREATENING TO BECOME A GALE.
OH, MY!
THIS MEANS MOTHER IS QUITE FOND OF YOU, I'M SURE OF IT!

I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT!
OOH, I SIMPLY CANNOT WAIT FOR US TO GO TO HIERAGLION!
ARE ROSES REALLY THAT IMPOR-TANT?
WOW!
YET SHE GAVE ONE TO YOU AS A PRESENT! SHE MUST HOLD YOU IN HIGH REGARD INDEED!
NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO PLUCK THEM.
SHE NEVER ALLOWS THOSE ROSES TO LEAVE HER GARDEN, EVER.
YES. THEY'RE HERETICAL, AFTER ALL.
EUSIS!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?!
WHAT?! HOW CAN A FLOWER BE HERETICAL?!

THEY'VE FORMALLY ANNOUNCED THEIR SUPPORT OF PRINCESS LEANDRA'S BID FOR THE THRONE!
WE HAVEN'T A SECOND TO WASTE!
WHAT HAPPENED?!
I'M JUST FROM THE PALACE!
CHEVIAT IS ON THE MOVE!
WE HAVE A SERIOUS PROBLEM!
LOT?!
WITH A HOUSE AS POWERFUL AS CHEVIAT OFFICIALLY BACKING PRINCESS LEANDRA...
...ROLAND NEEDS TO COUNTER BY HAVING PRINCESS ADALE MAKE HER PALACE DEBUT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!

THE SUCCESSION WAR HAS BEGUN.
BUT, WHY? HOW?
THE DUKE OF RIEZ SET EVERYTHING OFF, I'M AFRAID.
THIS IS ENTIRELY TOO SOON. ALL OUR INFORMATION HAD THEM WAITING AT LEAST ANOTHER HALF A YEAR!
THE DUKE OF RIEZ...!
"WHY MUST I BE DENIED THE RIGHT TO SIT UPON THE THRONE?"
"BECAUSE I AM NOT A WOMAN? IS THAT ALL?"
THEN HE SAID, "THE PERSON MOST FIT FOR THE THRONE IS THE PERSON WITH THE MOST POWER."
"I AM ALSO A CHILD OF QUEEN ASTRAEA."
HE SAID SOMETHING SCANDALOUS...
HE'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE SERPENT AND STAR...

BUT THAT'S PREPOS-TEROUS!
THIS IS ASTRAEA! THAT A MAN COULD EVER SIT ON HER THRONE IS UNTHINKABLE!
HOUSE ROLAND STANDS TO LOSE THE MOST FROM THIS.
ROLAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PILLAR OF THE CONSERVATIVE SIDE, BUT SOME OF ITS SUPPORTERS ARE ALREADY STARTING TO LEAN TOWARDS RIEZ.
IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE HEDGING THEIR BETS AGAINST PRINCESS LEANDRA AND CHEVIAT'S PROGRESSIVES.
WE NEED TO GET TO HIERAGLION AS SOON AS PHYSICALLY POSSIBLE!

FIRIEL...
YOU'RE SHAKING.
"THE PRINCESS WILL AGAIN BECOME NOTHING BUT A POOR CINDER-SWEEPER..."
"...ONCE THE SPELL IS BROKEN."
RELAX. JUST BE YOURSELF, AND EVERYTHING WILL GO SPLENDIDLY.
"THE CARRIAGE WILL ONCE AGAIN BE A PUMPKIN, AND THE FOOTMEN, MICE."
THAT'S HOW IT GOES IN THE FAIRYTALE.
SO...

Chapter 17: The Palace Waltz

YOU SEEM TO BE HAVING TROUBLE CALMING YOURSELF, EUSIS.
NOT THAT I BLAME YOU, MIND.
THIS IS THE NIGHT PRINCESS ADALE MAKES HER OFFICIAL DEBUT AS A QUEEN-IN-WAITING.
IT IS NOT ADALE WHO WORRIES ME.
WHAT?
ADALE IS PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF CALMLY ANALYZING ANY SITUATION.
THIS IS WHAT SHE HAS BEEN TRAINED FOR.
I AM MORE CONCERNED ABOUT--
MISS FIRIEL? I SEE.

FIRIEL WAS RAISED IN THE COLD PURITY OF SERA FIELD.
WILL SHE BE ABLE TO SURVIVE IN THE CRUCIBLE OF INTRIGUE THAT IS THE ROYAL COURT?
PRESENTING HER LADYSHIP ADALE ROLAND, LADY OF THE HOUSE OF THE COUNT OF RUALGO!

MY, WHAT A LOVELY YOUNG LADY!
SHE LOOKS MUCH LIKE A SPRING FLOWER.

LOOK!
THERE IS ANOTHER GIRL!
SHE'S ABOUT TO DESCEND THE STAIRCASE.
TRUE.
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...
...SHE SEEMS AWFULLY DELICATE.
YES, BUT...
...SHE LACKS PRINCESS LEANDRA'S BOLD PERSONALITY.
BEAUTY ALONE WILL NOT GAIN HER ASTRAEA'S THRONE.
UNBELIEVABLE!
THE COUNT OF RUALGO HIMSELF IS HER ESCORT!
FIRIEL DEE. I NEARLY FAILED TO RECOGNIZE YOU.

WHO COULD THAT BEAUTIFUL LADY BE?!
COUNT ...

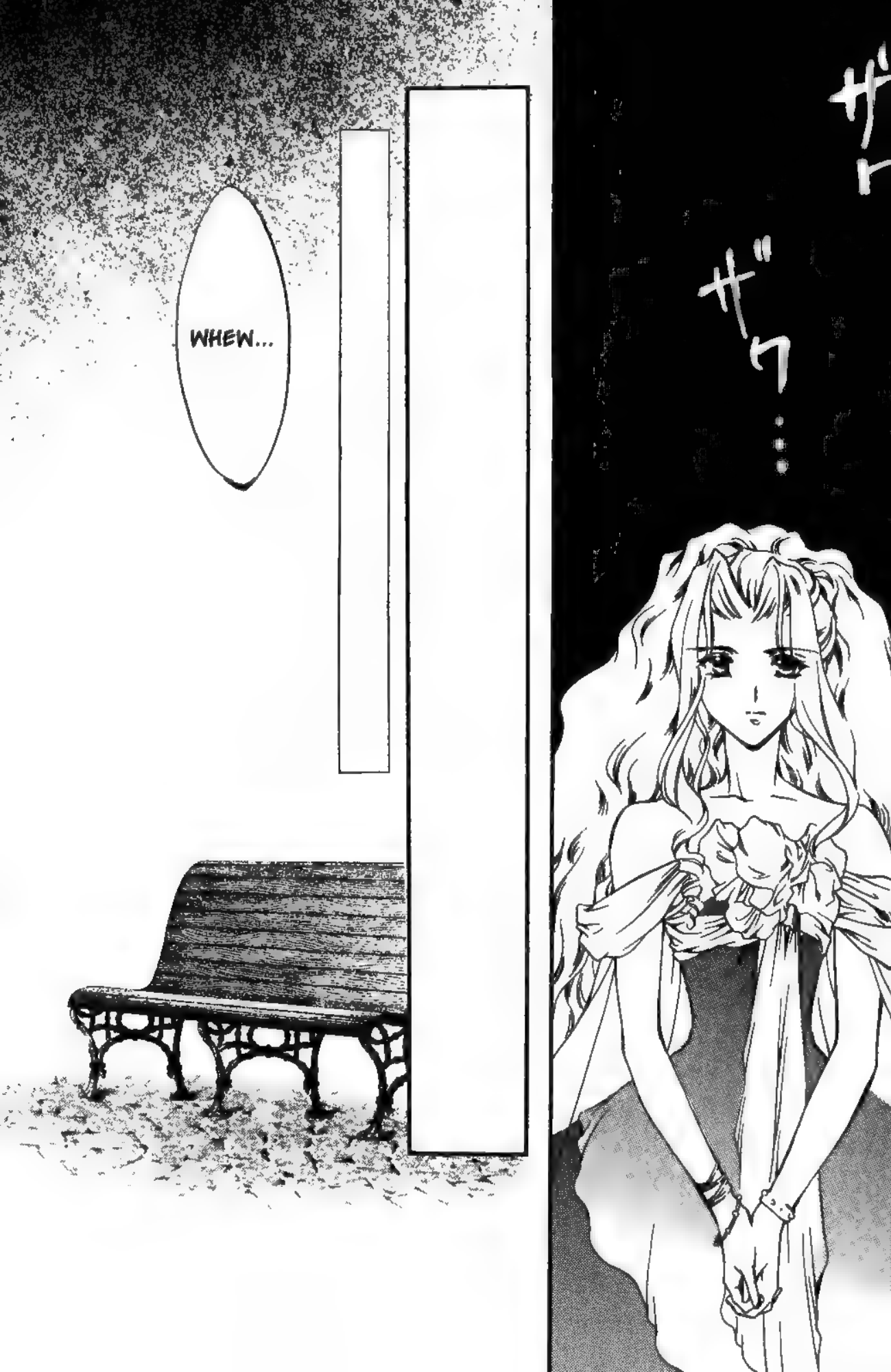
SUCCESS!
NOW ALL THE CHATTER IN THE COURT WILL BE ABOUT NOTHING BUT "THE MYSTERIOUS YOUNG LADY" FOR SOME TIME.
ADALE...
IT WAS NECESSARY TO CREATE AN IMPACT. THAT WAY WE DRAW THE EYES OF THE COURT TO US...
...AND AWAY FROM MY SISTER.
ADALE IS INCRED-IBLE!
YOU'RE HAVING FUN IN THIS TREACHEROUS SITUATION?
IT'S ONLY THE MOST ELEGANT BATTLEFIELD ANYWHERE.
mutter
WE MIGHT AS WELL ENJOY OURSELVES--

オオ
ooh!

HELLO, KITTEN. IT'S BEEN QUITE SOME TIME.
YOU TWO LOOK JUST LIKE ROSES, ONE RED AND ONE WHITE.
HOW PRECIOUS.
LUSTROUS BLACK AS DARK AS INK...
I FIND IT AMUSING THAT YOU SERIOUSLY THOUGHT TO USE SUCH CHILDISH TACTICS AGAINST ME.
THICK, CLOYINGLY SWEET SCENT...
IF WE'RE THE RED AND WHITE, THEN SHE'S THE BLACK ROSE!

ABOUT OUR DECISION TO WED, THAT IS.
カリ!!
HAVE YOU INFORMED YOUR SISTER YET, MY DEAR PRINCESS LEANDRA?
DUKE RIEZ!

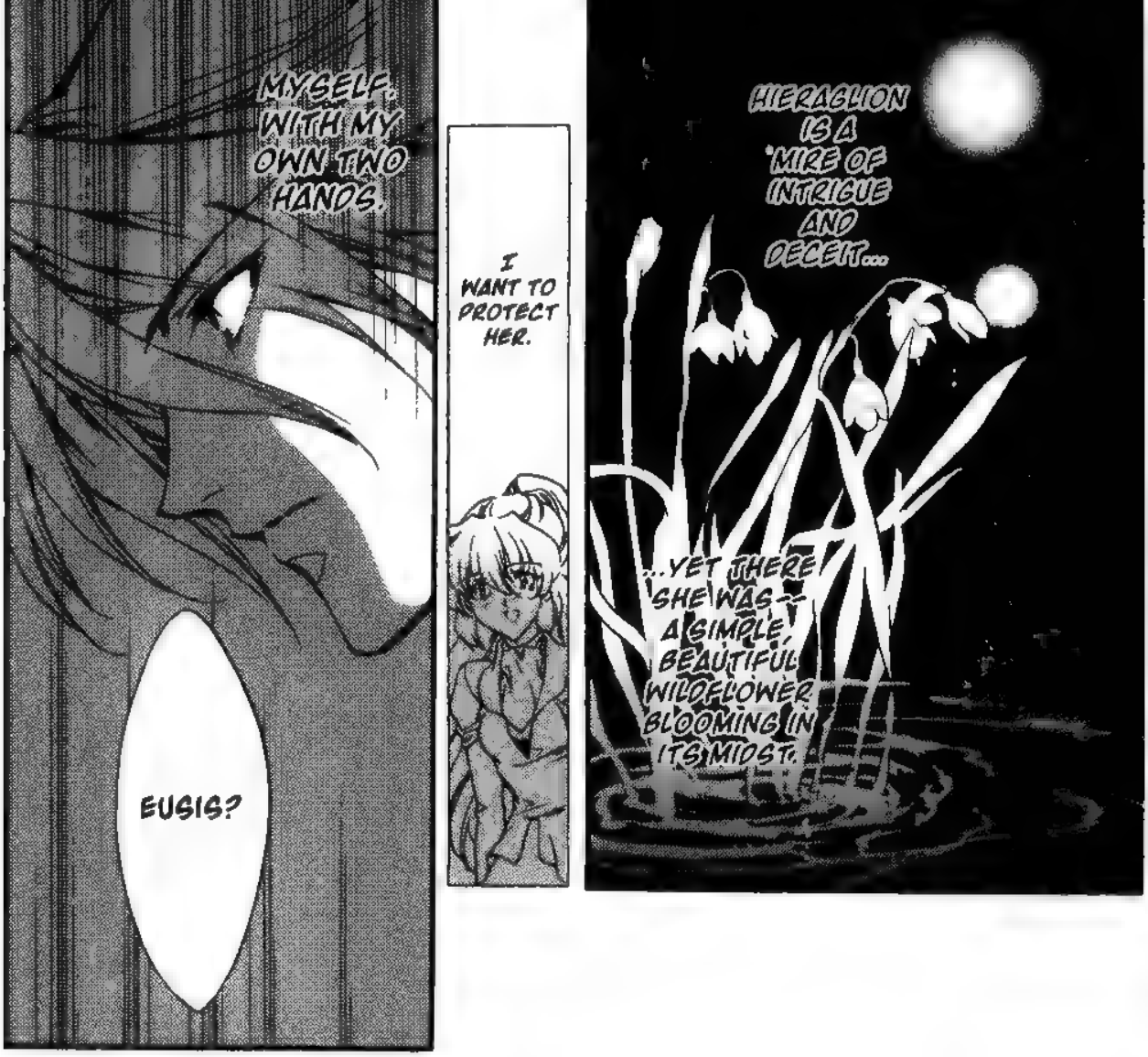
WHY IN THE NAME OF THE STARS WOULD HE WANT TO MARRY LEANDRA?!
DUKE RIEZ?!
...AND WHO'S ALSO PLOTTING TO TAKE HIS OWN MOTHER'S THRONE!
SO THIS IS QUEEN ASTRAEA'S SON, THE PERSON WHO'S SUPPOSED TO BE CONNECTED TO THE STAFF OF THE SERPENT...
THAT'S DECIDED IT, THEN.
ADALE...
PRINCESS ADALE CANNOT POSSIBLY RECOVER!
PRINCESS LEANDRA AND DUKE RIEZ...
IF THESE TWO MAJOR FORCES ARRAYED AGAINST ROLAND HAVE JOINED HANDS...


WHEW...

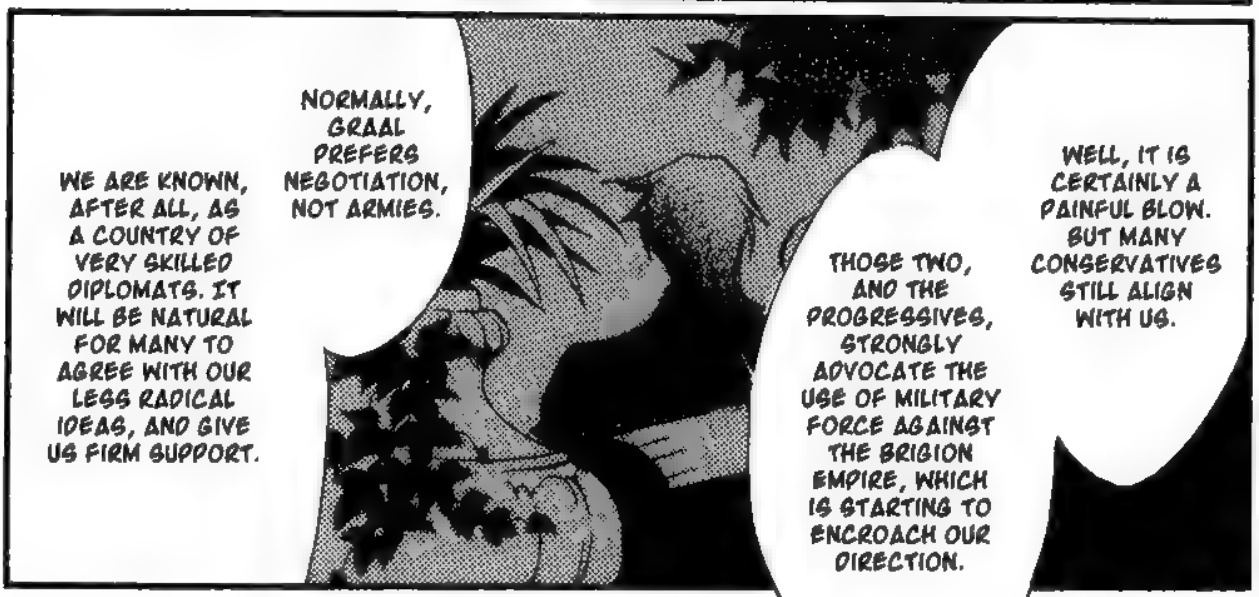
I'M SO VERY GRATEFUL YOU ASKED ME WHEN YOU DID.
YOU SAVED ME FROM ALL THOSE PRYING QUESTIONS!
YOU'RE THE BEST DANCER, EUSIS!
A LITTLE.
ARE YOU TIRED?
BUT I STILL HAD LOTS OF FUN!
Wait.
DON'T TELL ME...
YOU ASKED ME TO DANCE BECAUSE YOU KNEW I WAS IN TROUBLE...?

GREAT. I MUST HAVE FAILED MISERABLY, THEN.
Heh
DID THELMA TELL YOU THAT?
WAS I REALLY THAT TRANSPARENT BACK THERE?
...AREN'T SUPPOSED TO LET THEIR EMOTIONS SHOW ON THE SURFACE.
NOBLE LADIES...
WHEN I SAW HER...
LADY FIRIEL, I BELIEVE I HAVE NOT YET HAD THE PLEASURE OF DANCING WITH YOU TONIGHT. WOULD YOU BE SO KIND?
EXCUSE ME.

...MY HEART SKIPPED A BEAT.
HER EXPRESSION WAS AS OPEN AND TRUSTING AS THAT OF A YOUNG CHILD.
SUCH PURITY IS SOMETHING NEVER, EVER SEEN AT THE COURT.

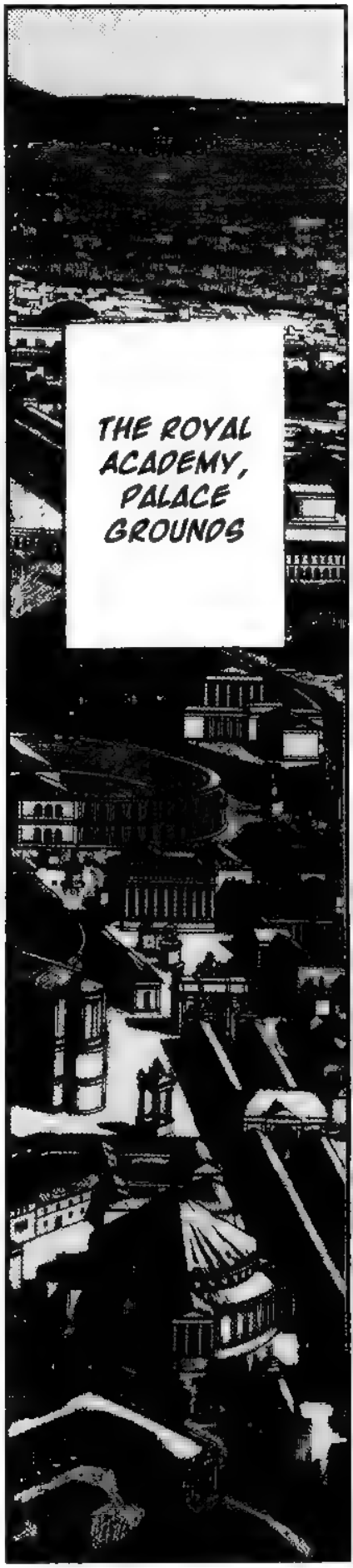

HIERAGLION IS A MIRE OF INTRIGUE AND DECEIT...
...YET THERE SHE WAS— A SIMPLE, BEAUTIFUL WILDFLOWER BLOOMING IN ITS MIDST.
I WANT TO PROTECT HER.
MYSELF. WITH MY OWN TWO HANDS.
EUSIS?

ADALE LOOKED SO...
IS LEANDRA'S MARRIAGE TO DUKE RIEZ SOMETHING BAD FOR US?


NORMALLY, GRAAL PREFERS NEGOTIATION, NOT ARMIES.
WE ARE KNOWN, AFTER ALL, AS A COUNTRY OF VERY SKILLED DIPLOMATS. IT WILL BE NATURAL FOR MANY TO AGREE WITH OUR LESS RADICAL IDEAS, AND GIVE US FIRM SUPPORT.
WELL, IT IS CERTAINLY A PAINFUL BLOW. BUT MANY CONSERVATIVES STILL ALIGN WITH US.
THOSE TWO, AND THE PROGRESSIVES, STRONGLY ADVOCATE THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE AGAINST THE BRIGION EMPIRE, WHICH IS STARTING TO ENCROACH OUR DIRECTION.

I'M CERTAIN THAT ADALE IS FORMULATING A NEW PLAN.
EUSIS!
I HAVE SOMETHING I NEED TO ASK OF YOU...!

DAMN NEW KID!
JUST BECAUSE YOU GOT LUCKY AND BEAT US...
...DOESN'T GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO PUT ON AIRS!


THE ROYAL ACADEMY, PALACE GROUNDS

YOU NEED TO LEARN THE PROPER MANNERS TO SHOW AROUND YOUR ELDERS.

HMM?
YOU KNOW...
...HE LOOKS PRETTY GIRLISH.
THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA.
TAKE HIM TO ONE OF THE STUDY ROOMS!
...UNTIL HE GETS IT.
WE'LL TEACH HIM THE RIGHT WAY TO BEHAVE AROUND HIS BETTERS...
YOU THERE! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!

UH-OH! IT'S THE COUNT'S SON...
EUSIS ROLAND!
WE'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE, ZENON!
HOW MANY OF YOU AGAINST JUST ONE BOY?
HAVE YOU NO SHAME?!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
ARE YOU OKAY?
WOULD YOU RATHER I'D NOT INTER-FERED?
...NO.
YOU HELPED.

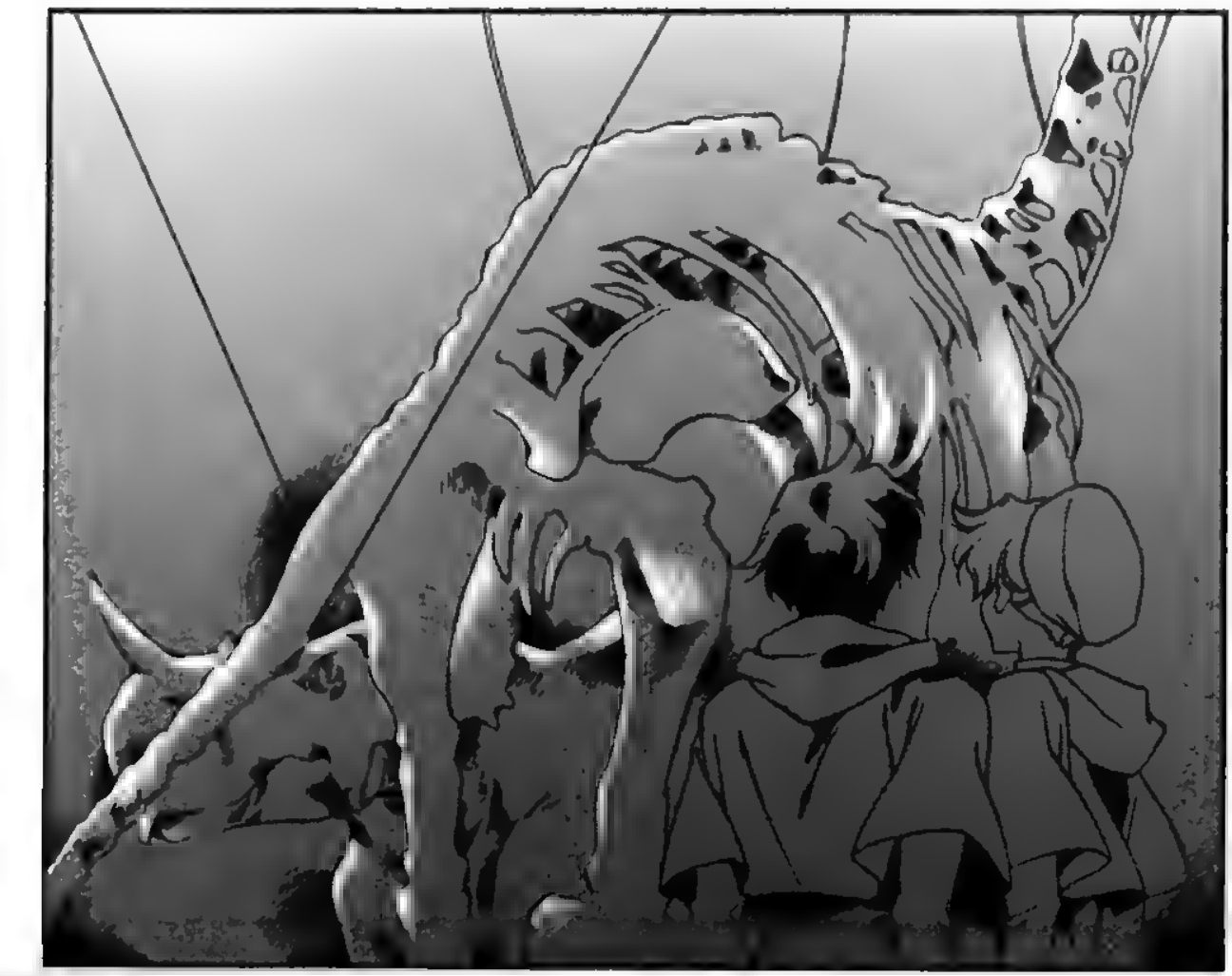
IT HAD ALMOST REACHED THE POINT WHERE I MIGHT'VE DONE SOMETHING BAD TO THOSE JERKS.
HOW IS SHE DOING, BY THE WAY?
EVERY NOW AND AGAIN, I CATCH GLIMPSES OF A VERY DANGEROUS SHADOW IN HIS EYES...
I'M DOING GREAT, RUNE!
I THINK I'M BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND WHY FIRIEL WORRIES ABOUT YOU.

YOU "TAGGED ALONG"?!
FIRIEL! GIRLS AREN'T ALLOWED IN HERE!
I KNOW THAT, SILLY.
THAT'S WHY I LOOK LIKE A BOY!
Tee hee hee! ♡
I DECIDED TO TAG ALONG.
HE'S IN NEED OF AN ASSISTANT.
THE ASSISTANT WILL BE QUARTERED IN THE LABORATORY, NOT THE DORMITORIES.
IT SEEMS THERE'S THIS PROFESSOR HE KNOWS REALLY WELL...
...ONE WHO HAS HIS OWN RESEARCH LABORATORY HERE ON CAMPUS.
WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO INTRODUCE YOU TO HIM?
BESIDES, I HAD TO COME. THERE AREN'T MANY PEOPLE WORSE THAN YOU AT GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS.
I FIGURED YOU'D BE GETTING BULLIED.
SO I WENT AND DISCUSSED THINGS WITH EUSIS.
えっ!?

EDDIE?!
IS...
IS THIS A DREAM...?
PROFESSOR CORNELL?
PROFESSOR, YOUR TIMING IS IMPECC-ABLE.

AH...
YES, I SEE.
THAT WAS OVER TWENTY YEARS AGO, AFTER ALL.
AND THIS IS PHIL. HE JUST ARRIVED AT THE ACADEMY.
HELLO.
O-OH. YES, YES...
YOU SAID HE'D LIKE TO BECOME MY ASSISTANT.
I BELIEVE I SPOKE TO YOU ABOUT HIM THE OTHER DAY.
THE BLACK-HAIRED BOY IS RUMPEL-STILTZKIN.
COULD HE BE TALKING ABOUT PRINCESS EDILENE?
"EDDIE" ...?
WOW!

PROFESSOR CORNELL.
IS THIS ENTIRE BUILDING YOURS?
YES. QUEEN ASTRAEA HOLDS ME IN HIGH FAVOR, YOU SEE.
IF HER HIGHNESS DECIDES YOUR RESEARCH IS FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF GRAAL...
...THEN YOU NEED NOT WORRY AT ALL ABOUT FUNDING, SPACE OR ANY OTHER MATTER.
YOU CAN DEVOTE YOURSELF TO NOTHING BUT YOUR RESEARCH, DAY IN AND DAY OUT.
FOR THE TRUE SCIENTIST, IT'S AN IDEAL SITUATION.
YEEK!
What?!
ACK!



THIS PLANET DOES NOT BELONG TO US, YOU SEE.
IT BELONGS TO THE DRAGONS.

HOWEVER, MOST OF THAT WORLD IS RULED BY DRAGONS LIKE THESE.
GRAAL MAY SEEM LARGE TO US...
...BUT IT IS ONLY A SMALL PART OF A BIGGER WORLD.

ARE THESE DRAGON BONES...?
AMAZ-ING...

I NEVER KNEW THEY WERE SO HUGE!

AND SOUTH TO WHERE THESE DRAGONS LIVE IS WHERE...
EUSIS, I'D LIKE A WORD WITH YOU.
IF YOU TWO WOULD BE SO KIND AS TO WAIT OUT HERE.
...THE PROFESSOR WENT...

I BROUGHT SOME CAKE!

WHAT?

SITTING HERE WITH YOU IT FEELS LIKE...
...WE'VE FINALLY MANAGED TO GO BACK TO THOSE DAYS.
A LITTLE DUSTY, A LITTLE STALE...
IT FEELS LIKE THE TOWER AT SERA FIELD IN HERE.
...THIS CERTAINLY IS AN IDEAL PLACE FOR RESEARCH.
WELL...
I THOUGHT YOU HAD ALREADY GUESSED.
WHAT?
THEN SHE REALLY IS, ISN'T SHE?
SHE REALLY IS THE DAUGHTER OF GIDEON AND EDDIE.
WHO IS THAT GIRL?!

...IT WAS ALMOST AS IF...
THE SECOND I SAW HER...
...TIME HAD REWOUND ITSELF.
BOY, YOU GO BY "RUNE," CORRECT?
GO GET YOUR THINGS.
THERE ARE SEVERAL SMALL ROOMS ABOUT. CHOOSE WHICHEVER YOU'D LIKE.

YOU WERE SO CHIPPER AND CHEERY...
...RIGHT AFTER YOU RETURNED FROM THE CHESSMASTER ACADEMY.
ADALE...
WHAT'S THE MATTER, FIRIEL?
ぼー
SHE'S RIGHT. I'D FINALLY GOTTEN TO SEE RUNE AGAIN AFTER WHAT FEELS LIKE FOREVER.
HMM...
BUT I CAN'T SEEM TO SHAKE THE FEELING THAT I FORGOT SOMETHING IMPORTANT...
OH YEAH!

I SAW RUNE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AGES...
...BUT I DIDN'T GIVE HIM A KISS!
THAT'S IT, THOUGH. IS THAT REALLY A REASON FOR ME TO BE THIS GLOOMY?
BUT I WANTED TO SEE THAT HAPPY LOOK HE GETS...
FIRIEL.
...THAT I'M...
BUT, DOES THAT MEAN...
...I GUESS...
THEN...
...I WAS REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO KISSING, TOO!

ADALE...?
I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO MARRY MY BROTHER AND BECOME THE COUNTESS ROLAND SOMEDAY?

"CONGRAT-
ULATIONS,
LADY FIRIEL!"
"I HEARD YOU
ARE SOON TO
BE BETROTHED
TO LORD EUSIS,
THE NEXT COUNT
ROLAND!"
WHAT?!

Chapter 18: Eyes of the Serpent

I MEAN, IF THERE'S ONE THING ALL THE YOUNG LADIES IN THE COURT AGREE ON...
ABOUT THE ONLY ONE WHO HASN'T HEARD THAT RUMOR IS YOU, FIRIEL.
NO ONE WOULD EVER BELIEVE ALL YOU DID THAT NIGHT WAS COME BACK HERE AND SNORE FIT TO WAKE THE DEAD.
MARIE!
...AND THEN YOU TWO DISAPPEAR INTO THE GARDENS. ALONE.
...IT'S THAT LORD EUSIS IS UNATTAINABLE. AND YET YOU DANCE WITH HIM THE NIGHT OF YOUR DEBUT...
I DON'T SEE WHAT YOU THINK IS SO AWFUL. EVERY LADY IN THE PALACE IS JEALOUS OF YOU.

WHAT WOULD RUNE SAY IF HE EVER FOUND OUT?!
UM...
"... AND BECOME THE COUNTESS ROLAND SOMEDAY?"
"HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO MARRY MY BROTHER..."
WHY WOULD ADALE ASK ME SOMETHING LIKE THAT, ANYWAY?
OH, LOOK!
HOW CUTE!

EVERY DAY, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE COME TO VISIT LADY ADALE'S SALON.
YES. I LOOK SO FORWARD TO MY VISITS HERE.
LADY LEANDRA'S SALON IS USUALLY VERY LIVELY, BUT...
...TOO MUCH SO.
AND HAS TOO MANY GENTLEMEN.
SHE MAY BE YOUNG ...
...BUT SHE CERTAINLY KNOWS HOW TO HOLD AN ELEGANT PARTY!
AND THE DEBATES ARE SO HARD TO FOLLOW.
TO BE HONEST, I AGREE.
tick tick
boom

EEEEEEK!!

WHAT HAPPENED?!
THE BUNNY JUST DISAP-PEARED?
ONLY ONE PERSON WOULD DO SOMETHING THIS CRUEL...
...THIS HEART-LESS.
ME? THAT LITTLE TOY WAS STOLEN FROM BRIGION. IT'S A WEAPON THAT USES "FIRE POWDER."
IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THEY WILL USE THAT WEAPON EXTENSIVELY IN THE COMING WAR, GIVEN HOW EASILY IT CAN KILL.
THAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE IS FORBIDDEN! IT'S HERESY!
QUEEN ASTRAEA IS QUITE CLEAR ON THIS POINT!
KNIGHTS ARE ONLY ALLOWED TO USE SWORDS, SPEARS AND OTHER BLADED, HONORABLE WEAPONS!
I SEE YOU ARE STILL THE OBEDIENT LITTLE IDIOT.

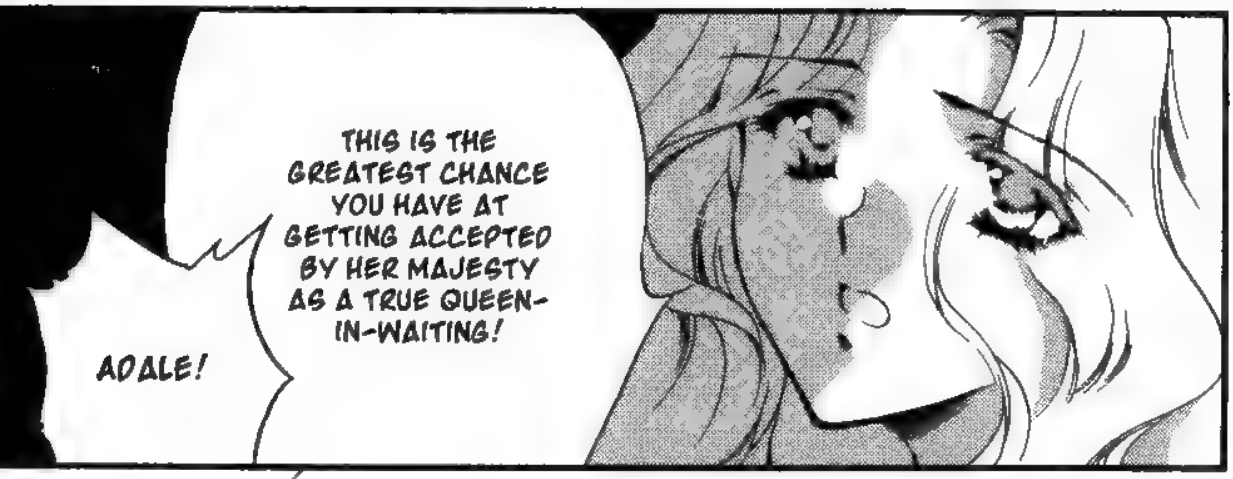
YOUR OWN PERSONAL KNIGHT IS IN THE ROYAL GUARDS, CORRECT?
YOU DO REALIZE...
...THAT WHEN BRIGION INVADES, HE WILL BE ONE OF THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES...
...FACING THAT KIND OF WEAPON WITH ONLY HIS PUNY LITTLE SWORD TO COUNTER IT.

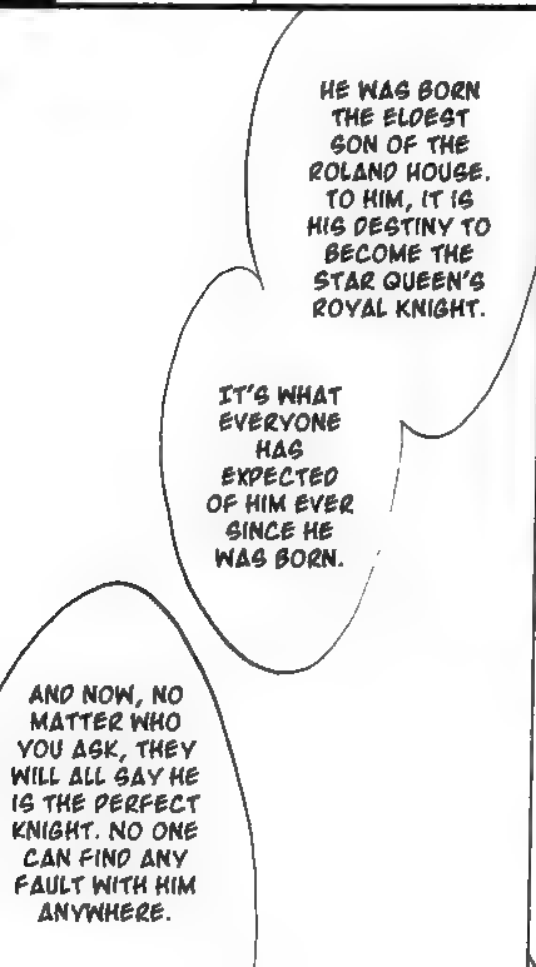
ADALE?
WHAT'S THIS? MOTHER'S ROSES?
GO TELL YOUR MAID TO DRESS THEM PROPERLY.
"DO BE SURE THOSE SCRATCHES DON'T LEAVE ANY SCARS ON YOUR HANDS."
...BUT...
"GRACIOUS."
EVEN THOUGH SHE SCOLDS YOU ALL THE TIME...
...MOTHER NEVER GETS UPSET AT ME!
I THOUGHT THAT IF I TOOK SOME OF HER ROSES, SHE MIGHT GET MAD...
I'M NOT HER REAL DAUGHTER, SO SHE DOESN'T CARE!

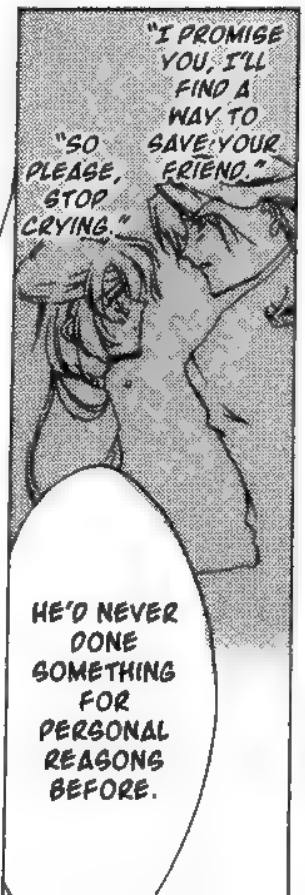
I'LL STAY WITH YOU, ADALE. ALWAYS.
I'LL BE YOUR OWN PERSONAL KNIGHT.
I PROMISE.
I WILL STAY CLOSE TO YOU, CLOSER THAN ANY FAMILY, AND PROTECT YOU.
I PLEDGE MY LIFE TO YOU. I WILL ALWAYS BE AT YOUR SIDE. I WILL GIVE MY ALL TO SERVE YOU.

"SO PLEASE, DON'T CRY..."
MY LORD BROTHER...
...HAS ALWAYS BEEN DEVOTED LIKE THAT. EVEN WHEN WE WERE LITTLE.
FIRIEL...
I DIDN'T SEE YOU AT DINNER.
I SNUCK INTO THE KITCHEN AND MADE SOME SANDWICHES FOR YOU.
FIRIEL, ARE YOU CERTAIN?
ARE YOU ABSOLUTELY SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO MARRY LORD EUSIS?

IF YOU BECOME HIS BETROTHED, THEN YOU GAIN THE RIGHT TO SEE GRANDMOTHER DURING THE ROYAL NEW YEAR CELEBRATION.
ADALE?!


THIS IS THE GREATEST CHANCE YOU HAVE AT GETTING ACCEPTED BY HER MAJESTY AS A TRUE QUEEN-IN-WAITING!
ADALE!


HE WAS BORN THE ELDEST SON OF THE ROLAND HOUSE. TO HIM, IT IS HIS DESTINY TO BECOME THE STAR QUEEN'S ROYAL KNIGHT.
IT'S WHAT EVERYONE HAS EXPECTED OF HIM EVER SINCE HE WAS BORN.
AND NOW, NO MATTER WHO YOU ASK, THEY WILL ALL SAY HE IS THE PERFECT KNIGHT. NO ONE CAN FIND ANY FAULT WITH HIM ANYWHERE.


"I PROMISE YOU, I'LL FIND A WAY TO SAVE YOUR FRIEND."
"SO PLEASE, STOP CRYING."
HE'D NEVER DONE SOMETHING FOR PERSONAL REASONS BEFORE.

WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE STARS HAS GOTTEN INTO YOU?
CALM DOWN!

I HAVE NEVER SEEN MY LORD BROTHER LIKE THAT BEFORE.

BUT...
BUT WHY MUST HE BE LIKE THAT?!
HE DOESN'T REALIZE THAT HIS DESTINY IS STRANGLING HIM!
...THAT SOMEDAY MY LORD BROTHER WOULD FALL IN LOVE...
I...
...ALWAYS HOPED, WISHED...
MY OWN WEAKNESS MADE HIM SO.
...AND DO THINGS...
...NOT BECAUSE HIS DUTY DEMANDED IT, BUT BECAUSE HIS HEART DID.
IF A PLEDGE MADE IN INNOCENCE WHEN WE WERE YOUNG...
...IS TO BECOME A CURSE THAT DRAGS HIM TO HIS DEATH...
...THEN PLEASE, SOMEONE RELEASE US FROM IT!

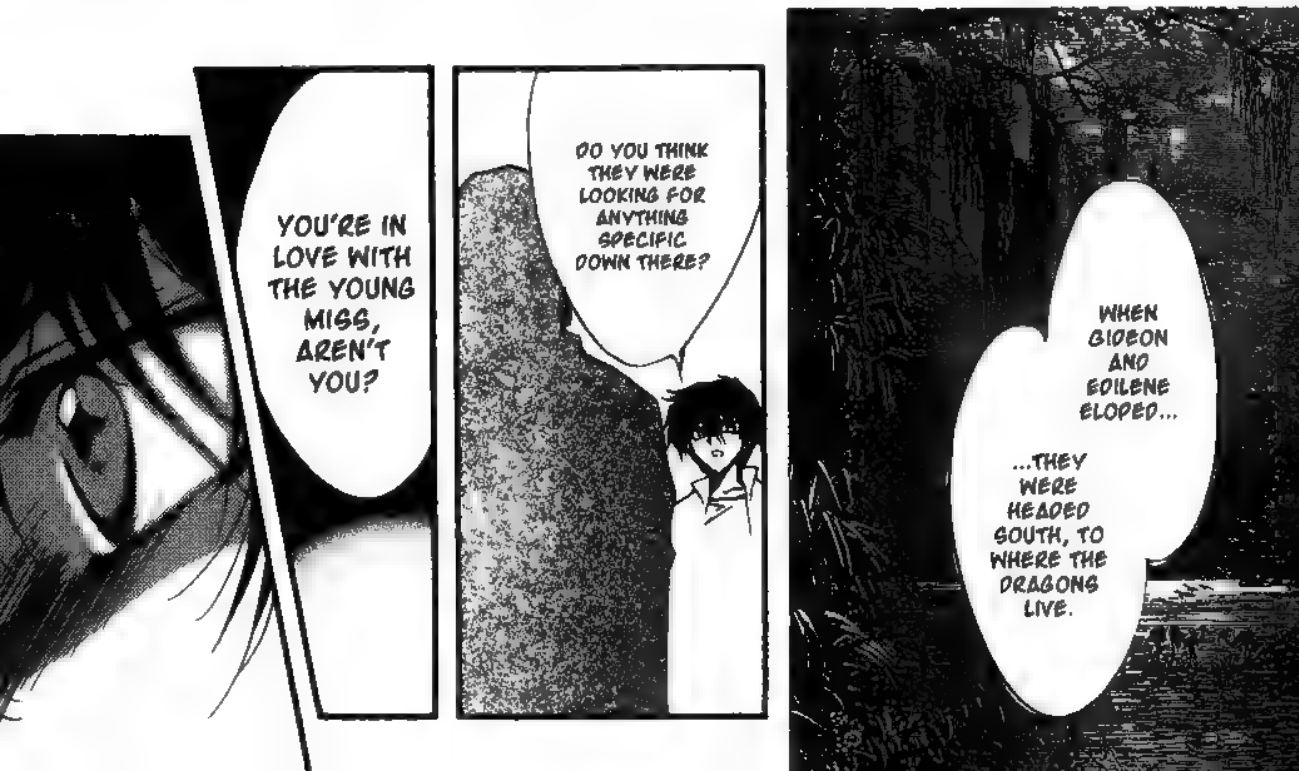
NO. I WON'T DO IT.
THERE'S NO POINT TO MEETING GRAND-MOTHER IF I'D HAVE TO GAIN THE PROPER RANK THROUGH BARGAIN-ING.
AND MARRYING EUSIS FOR JUST THAT REASON...
...WOULD BE INCREDIBLY CRUEL TO HIM!
BESIDES, AREN'T YOU ALWAYS TELLING ME...
...THAT MILITARY MIGHT IS ALWAYS THE VERY LAST RESORT?
THAT PEACEFUL NEGOTIATION MUST ALWAYS TAKE PRECEDENCE, SO THAT THE NEED FOR WAR WILL NEVER ARISE?
LET THE WORLD THINK WE ARE BEING PROTECTED BY OUR KNIGHTS...
...WHEN IN REALITY WE DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AND PROTECT THEM.

THAT'S THE WAY OF THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST, RIGHT?
I'M SURE YOU WILL THINK OF SOMETHING, ADALE.
AND I'LL DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP.
WE CAN WORK TOGETHER ...
...TO MAKE SURE NO ONE HAS TO GO TO WAR. OKAY?
FIRIEL...
HUH?
TRULY...

I HEARD AN INTRIGUING RUMOR THE OTHER DAY.
A LONG TIME AGO...
...GIDEON AND I WORKED TOGETHER HERE, STUDYING DRAGONS.
DRAGONS ...?
NOT THE STARS?
PROFESSOR CORNELL, DID YOU KNOW...
...EDILENE OR PROFESSOR DEE?
...IF SOMEONE LIKE YOU WOULD BE BY MY LORD BROTHER'S SIDE, THEN I...
IT'S ABOUT THE ROLAND BOY...
...AND MISS FIRIEL.
YOU KNEW PHIL--ER, FIRIEL, WAS A GIRL, SIR?
OF COURSE. SHE LOOKS EXACTLY LIKE HER MOTHER.
BOYS' CLOTHES OR GIRLS', I COULD TELL RIGHT AWAY.

HE TOLD ME ONCE...
...THAT THE DRAGONS HOLD THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING OUR WORLD.
THOSE WERE HIS EXACT WORDS.

THE DRAGONS ARE THE KEY TO OUR WORLD?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE MEANT BY THAT?
NOT THE FOGGIEST.
HOWEVER, I DO KNOW ONE THING.


WHEN GIDEON AND EDILENE ELOPED...
...THEY WERE HEADED SOUTH, TO WHERE THE DRAGONS LIVE.
DO YOU THINK THEY WERE LOOKING FOR ANYTHING SPECIFIC DOWN THERE?
YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH THE YOUNG MISS, AREN'T YOU?

EUSIS HAS A GOOD HEART.
I'VE KNOWN HIM SINCE HE WAS A PUP.
SCIENTISTS LIKE US ARE INCAPABLE OF MAKING A WOMAN HAPPY.
BUT GIVE UP ON HER.
NO ONE COULD BLAME YOU, SON.
YOU AND THE YOUNG MISS LOOK ENTIRELY TOO MUCH LIKE GIDEON AND EDILENE.
GIVE HER UP, FOR HER SAKE...
...SO THAT THE SAME TRAGEDY DOES NOT BEFALL YOU TWO.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THERE ARE PARTIES EVERY DAY HERE.
SHEESH.

DID YOU AWAKEN FROM YOUR NAP TO FIND YOURSELF IN A FOREST OF THORNS?

...BUT YOU SEEM A TRIFLE BORED, MY LADY.

PAR-DON ME...

DUKE RIEZ!

MAY I ASK WHAT YOU MEANT BY "FOREST OF THORNS"?
IT WAS FROM A FAIRYTALE. I THOUGHT YOU WERE FAMILIAR WITH SUCH THINGS...?
AFTER ALL, THEY ARE STORIES ONLY A ROYAL CAN KNOW.
HE... SCARES ME...
EXCUSE ME, DUKE. I THINK I'M GOING TO GO BACK TO THE PARTY NOW.
BUT I'M NOT FINISHED SPEAKING WITH YOU YET.

THE SAME NOBLE BLOOD FLOWS THROUGH BOTH OUR VEINS. ASTRAEA'S BLOOD.
YET I CANNOT INHERIT THE THRONE, JUST BECAUSE I AM A MAN!
YOU KNOW ABOUT WHO I REALLY AM THEN, MY LORD?
ASK ME. I AM HER YOUNGER BROTHER, YOU KNOW. I KNOW ALL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TWENTY YEARS AGO. I CAN TELL YOU EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO HEAR.
DON'T YOU WANT TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR MOTHER?
AREN'T YOU THE SLIGHTEST BIT CURIOUS?

A RIDICULOUS REASON, DON'T YOU THINK?
IT FEELS LIKE THERE'S POISON SEEPING FROM HIS HAND INTO MINE...
I DON'T LIKE THIS MAN-- I NEED TO GET AWAY!
LET ME GO!
WHEN I BECOME KING, FIRIEL DEE...
...I WANT YOU TO BE MY QUEEN.

SHE SEEMS TO THINK SHE CAN TAKE OVER MY ORGANIZATION.
AS IF A WOMAN COULD CONTROL IT PROPERLY. BAH! RIDICULOUS.
YOUR ORGANIZATION?
BUT HOW COULD A SON OF THE STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA BE INVOLVED IN A HERETICAL GROUP LIKE THE STAFF OF THE SERPENT?!
HMPH.
A NECESSARY PLOY TO UNITE THE PROGRESSIVES. DIVIDED, THEY COULD NOT POSSIBLY DEFEAT THE ROLANDS.
WHAT?! BUT YOU'RE BETROTHED TO LEANDRA!
BESIDES, IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S NOT USING ME AS WELL.
...DAUGHTER OF TRAITORS.
YOU'RE TAINTED BY HERESY YOURSELF...
...YOU WOULD SWIFTLY BE TOSSED INTO DARKNESS SO DEEP THE LIGHT OF THE STAR QUEEN WOULD NEVER, EVER REACH YOU.
IF I WERE TO LET SLIP TO THE COURT YOUR TRUE ORIGIN...

YOU CANNOT ESCAPE ME, FIRIEL DEE.
MY PLANS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN.
IN THE END, YOU WILL BE MINE.
NO...!
LET ME MARK YOU WITH MY SEAL TO PROVE IT, RIGHT HERE AND NOW.

YES! WHAT?!
PRINCE LIAMON! PRINCE LIAMON, ARE YOU THERE?
HIS GRACE THE PRIME MINISTER WISHES TO SPEAK WITH YOU.
THAT VOICE...!
...HMPH!

FIRIEL!
I KNEW THAT WAS YOUR VOICE!
I'M SORRY, FIRIEL.
I WAS SLOW TO REALIZE WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO YOU. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
DID THE DUKE DO ANYTHING TO YOU? DID HE SAY ANYTHING?

I NEVER KNEW A MAN COULD BE THAT FRIGHTENING.
HE SAID HE ALREADY HAD PLANS IN MOTION TO MAKE ME HIS.
HE ...
I WAS SO SCARED.
...HE CALLED ME "TAINTED"...
...AND THE "DAUGHTER OF TRAITORS."
sniff
sniff...

PIRIEL
WOULD YOU MARRY ME?
HE FEARS NO PUNISHMENT, SO HE WILL INADVERTENTLY USE WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY.
TO AVOID THAT
QUEEN AZTECA HAS ALWAYS BEEN NECESSARILY LENIENT TOWARDS HER SON
AND NOW HE HAS GOT HER SON'S HATE ON PIRIEL

LETTING A MAN LIKE THE DUKE HAVE YOU IS UNTHINKABLE.
I WANT TO PROTECT YOU.

"LETTING A MAN LIKE THE DUKE HAVE YOU IS UNTHINK-ABLE."
"FIRIEL, WOULD YOU MARRY ME?"
"WHEN I BECOME KING, FIRIEL DEE, I WANT YOU TO BE MY QUEEN."

Chapter 19:
A Fantasia and a Fugue

WHAT DO YOU THINK I SHOULD DO?
WHY ISN'T HE SAYING ANYTHING?
I THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA.
RUNE?
RUNE!

GIVEN YOUR CURRENT SITUATION ...
...MARRYING EUSIS IS THE ONLY WAY.
ASKING ME WHAT I THINK YOU SHOULD DO...
...IS POINT-LESS.
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE IN THE FIRST PLACE, FIRIEL.

LETTING EUSIS PROTECT YOU IS A GOOD IDEA.
HIS FACE LOOKS SO COLD.
IT'S LIKE HE'S SOMEONE I'VE NEVER KNOWN BEFORE.
スッ
OKAY. I GET IT.

YOU JUST DON'T CARE, DO YOU?!
I COULD GO OFF AND GET MARRIED AND IT WOULDN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOU AT ALL!!
WHY?
WHY DOES MY...
COMING TO ASK YOUR ADVICE WAS A DUMB IDEA!
...HEART HURT SO MUCH?

DAM-
MIT!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU DON'T LOOK WELL.
STUPID RUNE!
LORD EUGIS!

I'VE NEVER BEEN GOOD AT THINKING OF SUCH THINGS MYSELF.

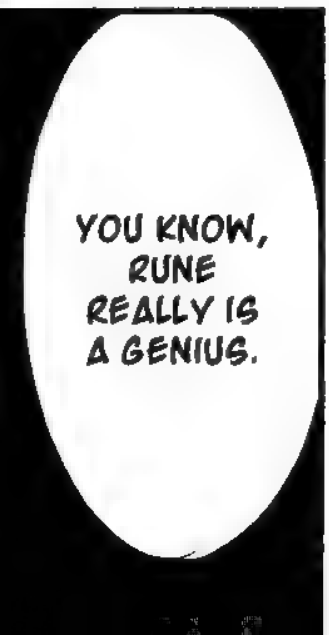
FLOWERS?
LOT TOLD ME IT'S PROPER MANNERS ...
...TO BRING FLOWERS WHEN VISITING A LADY.

ACTUALLY, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE BROUGHT FLOWERS TO A LADY.

BUT THINGS CHANGE.
WHEN I ASKED YOU TO MARRY ME, PROTECTING YOU FROM THE DUKE WAS THE MAIN REASON...
...BUT IT WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE.
EUSIS...
PLEASE REMEMBER THAT.
Sigh
I'M SO JEALOUS! ♡

FIRIEL?
I... MARIE ...
AND HAVING SOMEONE LIKE HIM PROPOSE TO YOU...
FIRIEL, YOU'RE SO LUCKY!
LORD EUSIS TRULY IS A WONDERFUL, LOYAL GENTLEMAN.

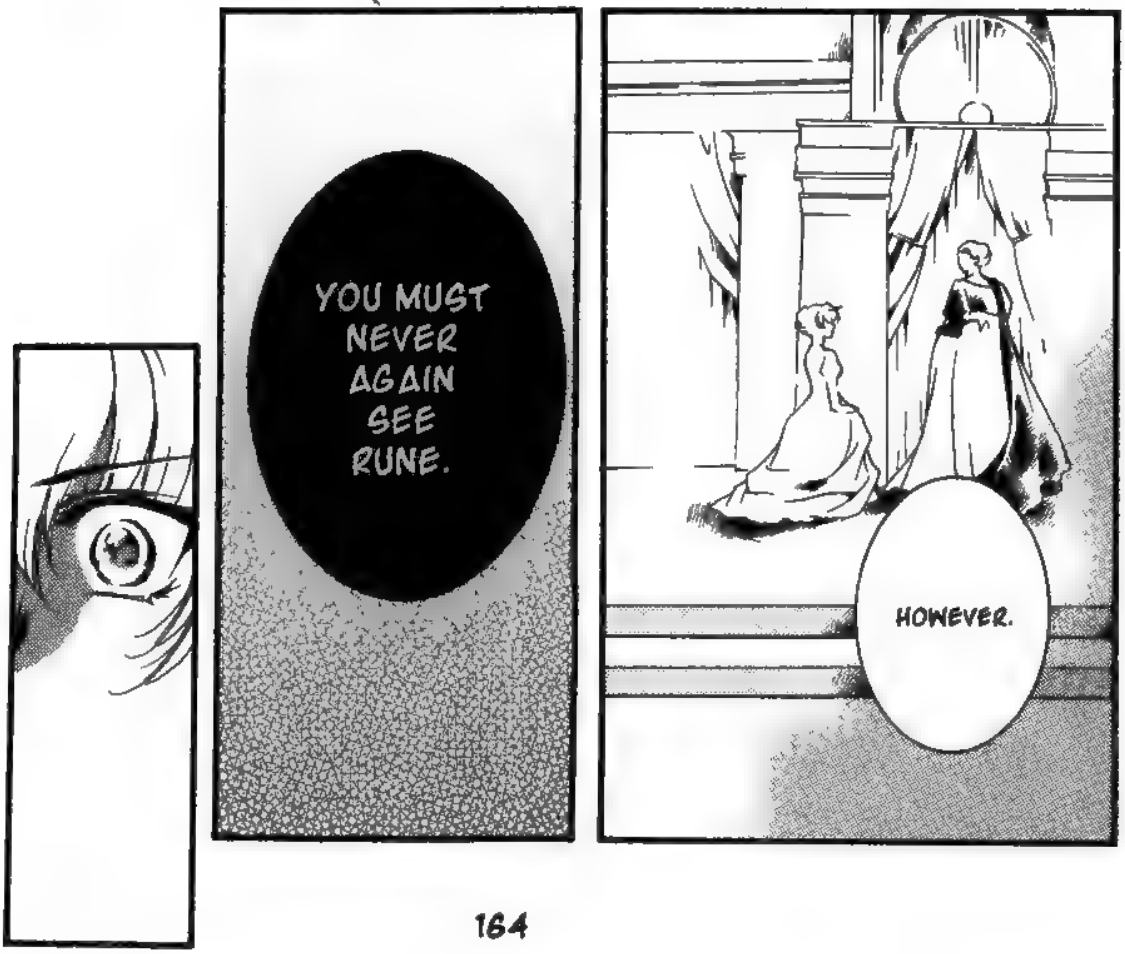
I JUST DON'T KNOW IF I...!


YOU KNOW, RUNE REALLY IS A GENIUS.

HE'S ALREADY TOLD YOU THE ONLY SMART THING ANYONE COULD SAY.
I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE THERE'S ANYTHING HE COULD DO ABOUT IT, ANYWAY.
TRYING TO KEEP YOU FROM MARRYING LORD EUSIS WOULD BE STUPID.
IT'D JUST PUT YOU IN EVEN MORE DANGER.
PERSONALLY, I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE YOU'RE BEING SO INDECISIVE ABOUT THIS.
I HAVE TO UP MY OPINION OF RUNE.
"LETTING EUSIS PROTECT YOU IS A GOOD IDEA."
RUNE...

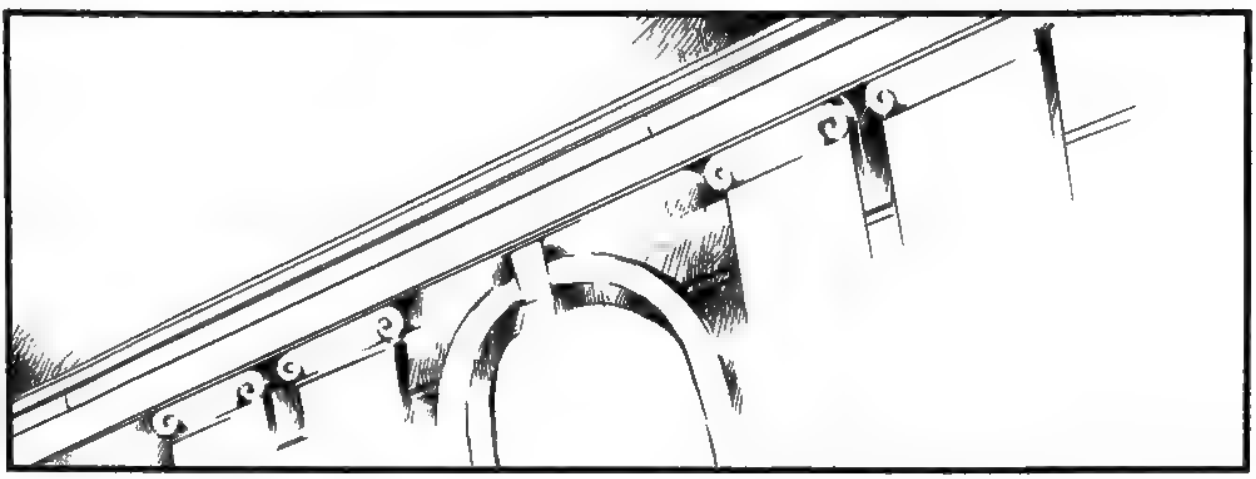
I...
...REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE, DO I?
THEN YOU'VE ...
...MADE UP YOUR MIND?
gulp...

I HAVE HEARD EVERY-THING FROM EUSIS.
NEITHER I NOR MY HUSBAND HAVE ANY OBJECTION TO YOUR MARRIAGE.


HOWEVER.
YOU MUST NEVER AGAIN SEE RUNE.

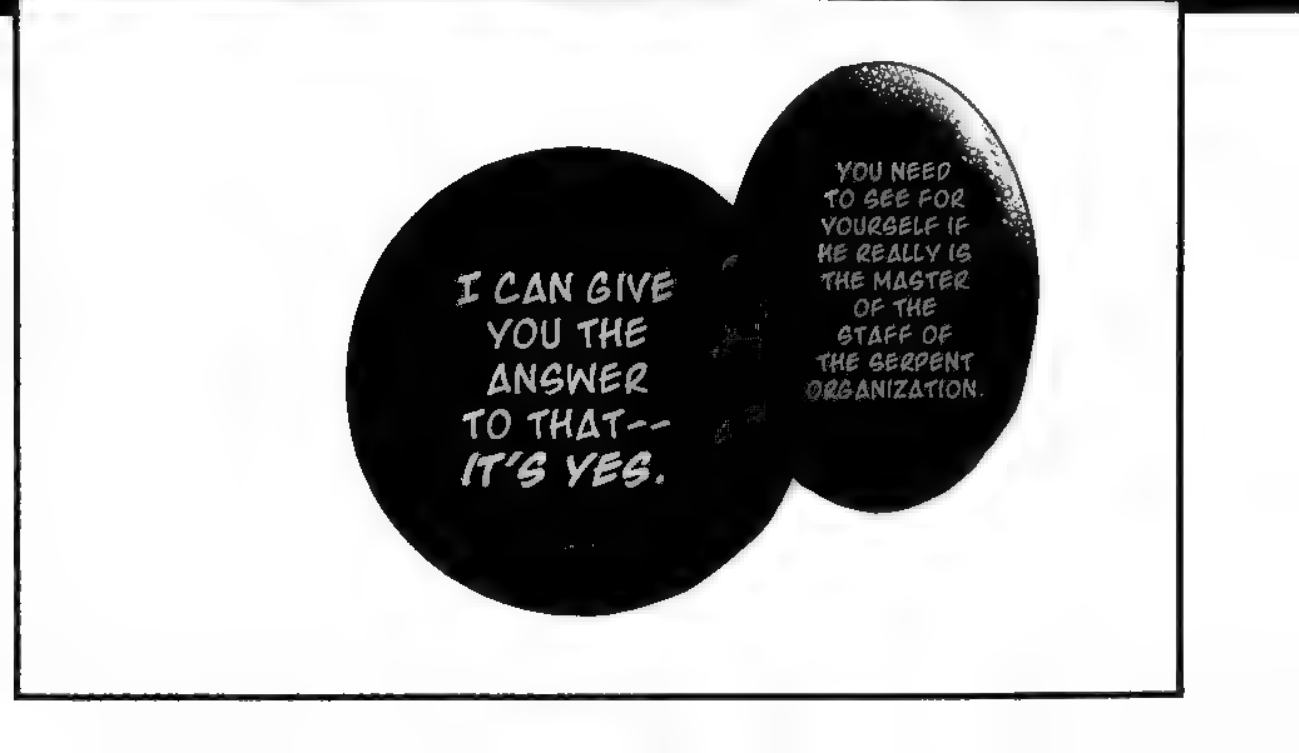
THE HOUSE ROLAND WILL ACCEPT YOU AS ITS NEXT COUNTESS...
...IF...
...YOU HAVE UTTERLY AND COMPLETELY REMOVED YOURSELF FROM ANYTHING THAT COULD BE CONSIDERED HERESY.
BUT...!
IF YOU WISH TO BE ALLOWED INTO HER MAJESTY'S PRESENCE, YOU MUST PURIFY YOURSELF OF ALL TAINT.
IF YOU WISH SAFETY...
...YOUR ONLY CHOICE IS TO SEVER YOUR CONNECTIONS TO ANYTHING HERETICAL.
SHE CAN'T SERIOUSLY EXPECT ME TO STAY AWAY FROM RUNE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE!

IF YOU CANNOT SWEAR TO ABIDE BY THIS REQUIREMENT, THEN THE HOUSE ROLAND WILL NOT PERMIT YOUR BETROTHAL.



LOOKING FOR SOMEONE?
I GOT YOU...
...MY LITTLE RUNETTE. ♡

LOOKING FOR MY DEAR HUSBAND-TO-BE, I BET.
THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!
AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING SNEAKING AROUND THE PALACE, HMM?
LET ME GO!


I CAN GIVE YOU THE ANSWER TO THAT-- IT'S YES.
YOU NEED TO SEE FOR YOURSELF IF HE REALLY IS THE MASTER OF THE STAFF OF THE SERPENT ORGANIZATION.

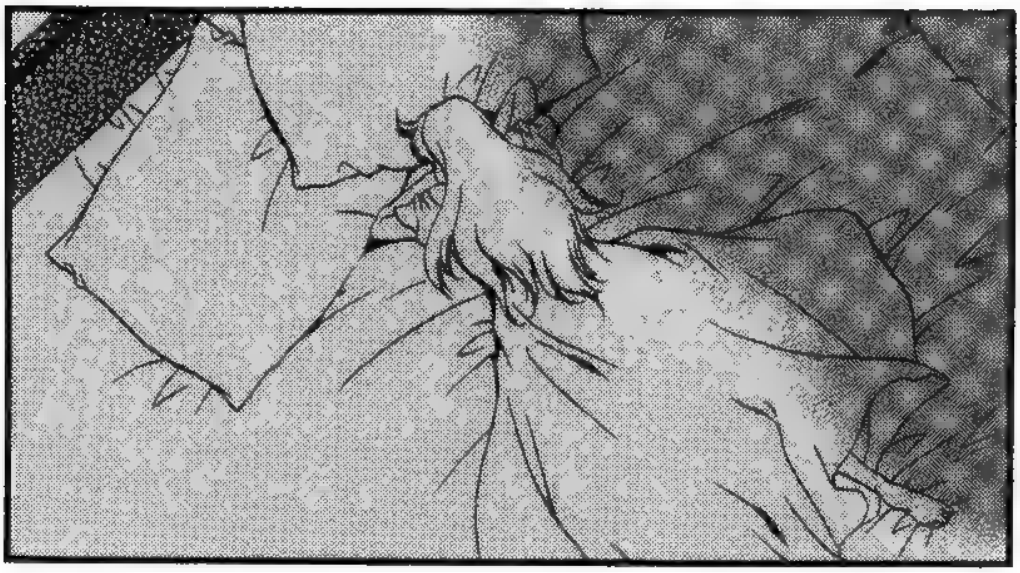
HE IS THE HERMES TRISMEGISTUS YOU SEEK.

I HEARD HE WANTS TO MAKE THE LITTLE KITTEN HIS QUEEN, TOO.
WHAT A TOTAL FOOL FOR BLABBERING HIS TRUE INTENTIONS.
HER INNOCENCE MUST HAVE LULLED HIM INTO OVERCONFI-DENCE.
I HAVE NO USE FOR FOOLS. HENCE, THAT MAN NO LONGER HAS ANY VALUE TO ME. NOR I FOR HIM, MOST LIKELY.
I EXPECT HE WILL TRY TO ERASE ME, AS SOON AS HE CAN FIND THE MEANS.
OF COURSE...
...HE WILL BE TOO LATE. I'M NOT NEARLY SO NICE AS TO JUST LET MYSELF BE KILLED.
I WILL BURY HIM FIRST, AND I HAVE ALREADY FOUND MY MEANS.

I KNOW WHAT YOUR GREATEST DESIRE IS...
...RUNETTE.
IF I WERE TO SEND AN ASSASSIN TO REMOVE THAT MAN...
...THEN THAT DESIRE WOULD FOREVER REMAIN UNFULFILLED, YES?
WHAT SAY WE MAKE A DEAL?

YOU WANT TO TAKE HIS LIFE YOURSELF.

I CAN GIVE YOU THE CHANCE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR.
IN EXCHANGE, ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU COME TO ME.



"YOU MUST PURIFY YOURSELF OF ANY CONNECTION TO HERESY."
THAT ALMOST SOUNDS...
...LIKE SHE'S CALLING RUNE A STAIN OR SOMETHING.
DO I DESIRE SAFETY THAT MUCH?
BADLY ENOUGH TO GIVE UP RUNE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE?

EUSIS... ADALE...
I'M SORRY.

I NEED TO GO SEE RUNE...
...AND THEN...
...I NEED TO TELL HIM I--!

RUNE...
RUNE! I WAS JUST COMING TO SEE YOU.

LET'S RUN AWAY FROM THE PALACE! TOGETHER!
I COULDN'T SPEND MY LIFE NEVER SEEING YOU AGAIN.
THAT'S THE SAME AS BEING DEAD TO ME.
I'M SURE MOTHER THOUGHT THE SAME WAY, ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.
SHE JUST WANTED TO BE WITH THE MAN WHO WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO HER THAN HER OWN LIFE.
THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE BUT TO RUN AWAY. I UNDERSTAND THAT NOW...

...BECAUSE I FEEL THE SAME WAY!
I DON'T CARE WHAT THE DANGER IS, SPENDING A DAY AWAY FROM YOU IS FAR WORSE!
PLEASE, RUNE, TAKE ME WITH YOU!
I...

...LOVE YOU!

FIRIEL...
I'M SORRY.
RU...

IT WAS MY ONE DEAREST WISH.
I WANTED TO STAY WITH YOU. I REALLY DID.
I'VE ALWAYS LOVED YOU.
YOU'RE MY ONE AND ONLY, MY YUNA.

RU...?
WHA ...?
CAN'T... HEAR TOO...
GOOD-BYE...
...FIRIEL.

chirp
chirp
A DREAM ...?

FIRIEL! IS RUNE HERE?!
EUSIS? WHAT'S WRONG?
huff
DUKE RIEZ WAS ASSAS-SINATED LAST NIGHT!
THE PRIME SUSPECT IS RUNE!

End of Book 4

Thank you so much, everyone!!! ♥♥♥

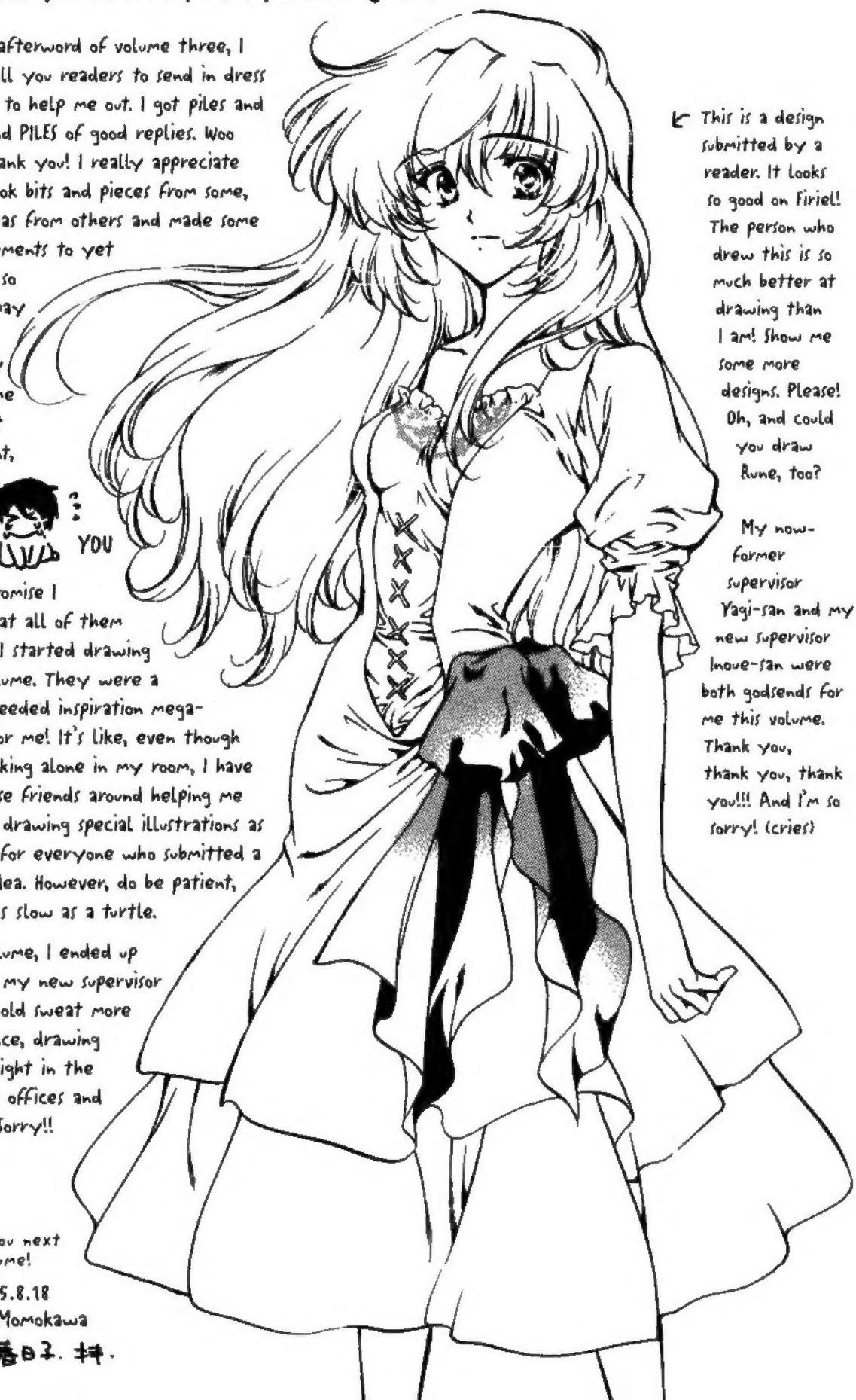
In the afterword of volume three, I asked all you readers to send in dress designs to help me out. I got piles and piles and PILES of good replies. Woo hoo! Thank you! I really appreciate it!! I took bits and pieces from some, the ideas from others and made some arrangements to yet others, so they may not be exactly the same as what was sent,

but I promise I looked at all of them before I started drawing this volume. They were a much-needed inspiration mega-boost for me! It's like, even though I'm working alone in my room, I have all these friends around helping me out. I'm drawing special illustrations as thanks for everyone who submitted a dress idea. However, do be patient, as I'm as slow as a turtle.

This volume, I ended up putting my new supervisor into a cold sweat more than once, drawing pages right in the editor's offices and stuff... Sorry!!

See you next volume!

2005.8.18
Haruhiko Momokawa
桃川 春日子. 拝.

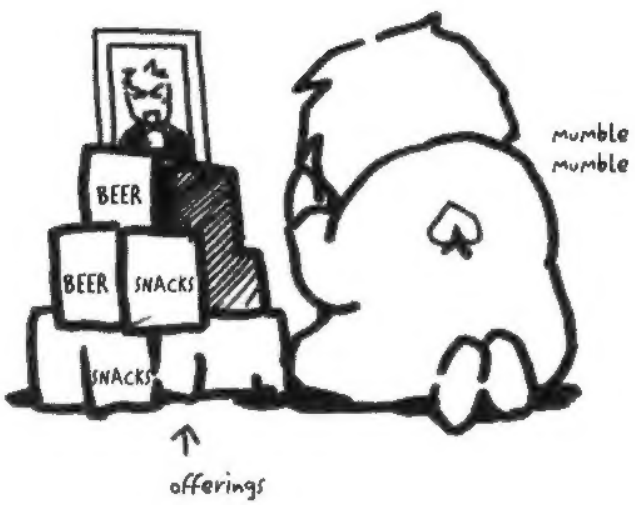


← This is a design submitted by a reader. It looks so good on Firiel! The person who drew this is so much better at drawing than I am! Show me some more designs. Please! Oh, and could you draw Rune, too?

My now-former supervisor Yagi-san and my new supervisor Inoue-san were both godsends for me this volume. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!! And I'm so sorry! (cries)

DEAR CAPTAIN GARLAND...
I AM VERY SORRY TO SAY THAT WE CANNOT MEET YOU IN VOLUME FOUR.
I HAD ATTEMPTED TO CUT SOME OF LORD EUSIS' SCENES SO AS TO GIVE YOU SOME PAGE TIME, BUT MY SUPERVISOR DID NOT APPROVE. PLEASE DO NOT TELL ANYONE, AS THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET.
My supervisor just happens to be a big fan of Lord Eusis, by the way.
Revealing this is a tiny little bit of revenge.
Wow! I'm so high up!
Ha ha ha!
IT IS MY DEAREST HOPE...

...THAT I WILL BE ALLOWED TO DRAW YOU A WHOLE LOT IN VOLUME FIVE.



Dear Mother,

I'm going to travel south! First my father the Professor went there, and now I suspect Rune has fled there as well. Eusis has taken on a challenge to slay dragons down there, so tailing him will be a perfect cover to get myself near Rune and the Professor. Will I find the answers I need in the place those I love have sought?

Firiel Dee

In the Next

The Good Witch of the West™